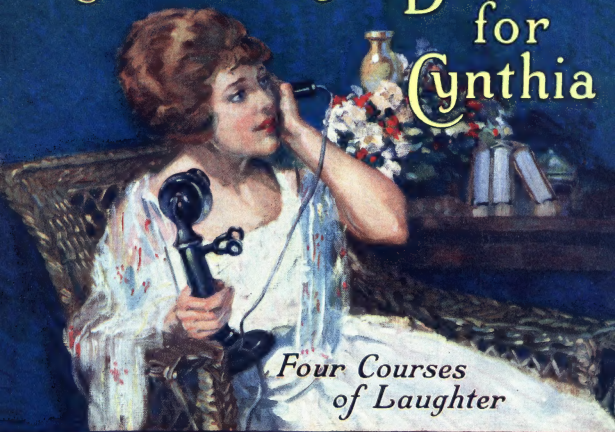


ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Edgar Franklin's *Dinner
for
Cynthia*



*Four Courses
of Laughter*

10¢ PER
COPY

APRIL 18

BY THE YEAR \$4⁰⁰

**Extra Thick
Full
Oversize**

Derby CORD TIRES

Yes, only \$1.00 down now brings you the genuine Derby Cord tire on approval. This is your opportunity to equip your car with brand new, first grade genuine Derby Cord tires at lower than list prices of advertised brands and on small monthly payments without feeling the expense. Read:

Down

**Balance
on Easy
Payments**

Guaranteed 10000 Miles

The genuine Derby Cord tire is guaranteed to be absolutely first quality. If any defects should develop, we will replace or repair the defective tire on the basis of 10,000 miles of service. The Derby tire is branded with the Straus & Schram name and backed by Straus & Schram ironclad guarantee. We know how the Derby is made and we say — no matter what brand or what price, there is no better tire than the Derby. The Straus & Schram Derby Oversize Cord is an EXTRA HEAVY, EXTRA THICK, FULL OVERSIZE cord tire. Compare it for size and weight with ANY other well known makes sold for cash at higher prices.

Derby Special Non-Skid Tread

Our exclusive Derby Non-Skid Tread is extra thick and semi-flat, providing nearly twice as much wearing surface as the ordinary rounded or flat tread. So tough that it will show almost no wear after thousands of miles of service. The tread is scientifically designed to give the highest non-skid efficiency. The friction surface is of unadulterated new rubber, carefully vulcanized to prevent separation. The Derby Cord tire has that handsome all black color now preferred by motorists.

Terms as low as —

Yes, on this wonderful new plan, you can pay for your tires on easy monthly terms as low as

\$1.50 a Month

\$1.50 a month—6 months to pay. You need not wait until you have the cash. Get as many tires as you'll need for your car this entire season and pay while using them — only \$1.00 down, balance in six equal monthly payments. You won't feel the expense on this monthly payment plan and you'll be free from tire trouble all year.

On Approval Send Coupon

Only \$1.00 with coupon brings the Genuine Derby tire to you on approval at our risk. If not satisfied after examination, send it back and we will refund your dollar plus transportation charges. Send the coupon today while these lowest rock-bottom prices last.

STRAUS & SCHRAM, Dept. T 8274, Chicago, Ill.

I enclose \$1.00. Send me on money-back approval and subject to your 10,000-mile guarantee the genuine Derby Cord Tires and Tubes I have ordered below. If I am not satisfied, I may return the tires at once and you will refund me \$1.00 including transportation charges. If satisfied, I will pay the balance of the total amount of my order in six equal monthly payments.

You can buy 1, 2 or 3 tires and 1, 2 or 3 tubes up to \$50.00 worth for \$1.00 down on this coupon, balance in six equal monthly payments.

Derby Cord Tires. No. _____ Total Price _____
How Many _____ Fill in Tire No. _____

Tubes. No. _____ Total Price _____
How Many _____ Fill in Tube No. _____

Name _____

Address _____

Shipping Point _____

Post Office _____ State _____

Our Prices (6 Months to Pay)

Climber Cord Tires. Number		
30 x 3 Standard Size	\$ 9.95	ZR234A
30 x 3 1/2 Oversize	11.95	ZR235A
30 x 3 1/2 Oversize	13.80	ZR236A
30 x 3 1/2 Giant Oversize	14.85	ZS238A

Note: We particularly recommend our 30 x 3 1/2 Giant Oversize Derby Cord — a bigger, better, stronger tire. Gives greater comfort and greater mileage and the price is only a few cents more per month! It's the best investment in the end.

Straight Side Cord Tires. Number		
30 x 3 1/2 Oversize	\$14.80	ZR237A
31 x 4 Giant Oversize	21.90	ZR239A
32 x 4 " "	22.95	ZR240A
33 x 4 " "	24.35	ZR241A

Inner Tubes

Order a New Tube With Your Tire. We offer gray inner tubes, extra strong, especially built to eliminate leaks. Also extra heavy red inner tubes which are 50% heavier than standard weight tubes and give extra service. All tubes made of best materials, thoroughly tested. *Shoppers will tell you it's best to have a new tube with a new tire.*

Size	Gray Tubes	Red Tubes
30 x 3	\$1.65 No. ZR242A	\$2.40 No. ZR247A
30 x 3 1/2	1.85 No. ZR243A	2.55 No. ZR248A
31 x 4	2.30 No. ZR244A	3.15 No. ZR249A
32 x 4	2.40 No. ZR245A	3.30 No. ZR250A
33 x 4	2.65 No. ZR246A	3.50 No. ZR251A

Straus & Schram
Dept. T 8274, Chicago, Ill.

Misunderstood!

—and she knew it
was her own fault!



"Oh, to be like other girls!"

By E. M. C.

TO be able to forget herself and have fun! To meet men on an equal footing! To be natural with them; to show them her *real* happy self! To be able to talk easily with them—to laugh and banter and play and dance with them, gaily and freely, as other girls did!

But, instead, men were always uneasy with her. They didn't know what to say to her. She didn't know what to say to them. *They seemed to want to get away from her.*

What was the matter? Was it always her fault? Yes, yes, it was—she knew! A thousand times she had seen men, and women, too, who were natural with others become unnatural and uneasy with her. *It was her own terrible self-consciousness that caused it.* She would lose her poise, when a man was around, act curiously, blush easily, talk unnaturally, and then the other people present would become embarrassed and ill at ease.

No wonder people didn't like to meet her, no wonder she was seldom invited out, no wonder there was not a man—not one!—who had ever shown the slightest interest in her company, except to get away from it.

Her mirror told her she was prettier than most girls; she knew she had more sense than most. Yet all she could see ahead was—loneliness! Bitter, bitter loneliness! None of the freedom and gaiety and laughter and companionship that she longed for with all her soul!

Does this seem an exaggerated picture? It is not. I know, be-

\$50 For Your Story

THE publishers of "The Cure of Self-Consciousness" want authentic anecdotes of cases where Self-Consciousness has caused excruciating embarrassment; or better still, of people whose careers have been checked because they were always self-conscious and timid. \$50 will be paid for each story accepted for publication. *No names will be given in publishing your story, if it is accepted.* Just tell the facts; they are more interesting to us than the way you tell them.

cause it is a picture of myself, as I was only a few months ago! Self-Consciousness! What a plague it is! How it blights the lives of those who suffer from it. And yet, as I later learned, it can be so easily overcome!

For self-consciousness is purely a mental condition. It is not a permanent trait of character; it is *acquired*. It might be called "in-grown imagination." James Alexander, an eminent English psychologist, has studied this strange and unhappy mental condition in all its phases. He found out that there are different types of self-conscious people. He studied and analyzed the causes of each type of Self-Consciousness. And then, learning the causes in each type, he devised simple, easily followed exercises that permanently remove any form of Self-Consciousness.

His fascinating work, "The Cure of Self-Consciousness," is now just published in this country and every girl—every man, too—who is made miserable by attacks of self-con-

sciousness, should read every word of it. It is simple and direct and as easy to read as fiction; it doesn't preach; it is as straightforward as a physician's advice about a bodily ailment. It tells you just what to do, and how to do it, in order to free yourself from this trouble *and be natural, free, happy and easy.* And no one need ever know you are practicing the simple exercises!

So remarkable is this work, in its effect on those who read it, that the publishers make an unheard-of offer. You can send for "The Cure of Self-Consciousness"; (it is in three handy-size volumes, and costs only \$2.85); you can read it, and begin trying Mr. Alexander's simple directions as to how to cure your form of self-consciousness, whatever it is. And if, within ten days, you don't see a marked improvement in the way you meet and talk with other people, return the books and your money will be refunded in full. Can a fairer offer than this be made?

You have nothing to lose, and just think what you have to gain—think what it will mean *never* to be embarrassed—to be free, easy, happy, and gay always—able to enjoy the companionship of others and have others enjoy your company. Mail the coupon or a letter now, under the money-back guarantee.

ROBERT K. HAAS, Inc.

Suite 264, 218 W. 40th St., New York

ROBERT K. HAAS, Inc., Suite 264

218 West 40th St., New York

Please send me, for 10 days' examination, Mr. Alexander's "The Cure of Self-Consciousness," in three handy-size volumes. I will give the postman \$2.85, plus postage, on delivery. If, after reading and studying them for 10 days, I want to return them for any reason whatever, you agree to refund my money.

Name

Address

City State

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLXVIII

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NUMBER 2

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This girl of the Golden West was merciful to a fugitive tenderfoot, hiding him from vengeful pursuers and providing a swift horse for his further flight. But it was not sympathy alone that caused her to defy her three pitiless brothers whose roaring .45s were the voice of law on the range. A thrilling, surprising story:

LORETTA BRODELL

By Kim Night

First of four installments next week.

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Amazing New Method Brings Skin Beauty OVERNIGHT!

Free book describes in full and tells how to apply Susanna Cocroft's New Discovery—as effective as a hundred dollar course of beauty treatments, yet you can apply it yourself at home at insignificant expense.



NO longer need thousands of women and girls submit to a muddy, sallow, blemished complexion and rough, ageing skin—disfigured by large pores, blackheads, pimples, blotches and other unsightly imperfections. Nor need any woman resign herself to those tell-tale little crows' feet and tired, nervous lines about eyes, nose and mouth—those pouches at the sides of the chin, double chin and an angular, scrawny, ill-favored neck.

For all these can now be corrected by a simple treatment which you apply in your own home. Even if your skin and complexion have been poor for years—even though you are no longer young, this wonderful new method so stimulates the circulation that your face is freshened and rejuvenated *overnight*.

Bring Out Your Hidden Beauty

You've seen actresses and society women whom you *knew* to be 40 years old and more. Yet they looked no older than 20. You've seen others of 50 who didn't look a day older than 30. They know the secret of keeping young, or they visit high-priced beauty specialists and give them big fees for keeping them young.

Look Years Younger

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For Susanna Cocroft, who has done more for the health and improvement of



SUSANNA COCROFT
Famous Health Authority

For years Susanna Cocroft has been in the forefront of the great movement for the physical and mental betterment of women. She has been recognized by the U. S. Government as an authority on women's health problems. She has written two bulletins for the U. S. Bureau of Education, and her helpful writings have many times appeared in magazines. Through her books, courses and treatments she has personally helped over 110,000 women.

American women than any other person, has evolved a method which enables you to apply in your own home a new scientific treatment taking *only a few minutes each night* to apply, which freshens and rejuvenates your skin as nothing you have ever used.

NEW HOME BEAUTY TREATMENT FOR

- clearing the complexion.
- giving color to the cheeks.
- firming sagging muscles.
- lifting out scrawny hollows.
- lifting double chin.
- building graceful neck.
- removing tired lines and wrinkles.
- closing enlarged pores.
- resting tired eyes.
- correcting excessive dryness.
- correcting excessive oiliness.
- whitening the skin.

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It works so rapidly that users say the very morning following your first use it shows an improvement that will delight you.

You know every fresh, healthy, clear skin is beautiful and now you may bring out this rose-petal beauty as well as do stage, society and screen beauties. You, too, may obtain the clear white skin, the sparkling eyes, the delicate, pink cheeks, the white, well-rounded neck of which they are so proud. And not only that, you can do it *quickly*—you can bring an astonishing improvement *overnight*.

Send For This Free Book Today

This amazing method is disclosed in an interesting *free book* which will be sent to every woman as long as the supply lasts.

Send for this amazing book today—it will not cost a penny and will not put you under any obligation. But write *at once*—before the edition is exhausted. Do it *now*. And soon, the very morning after you *begin* this treatment, you will doubtless astonish your family, your friends and even *yourself* by the remarkable improvement.

THOMPSON-BARLOW CO., Inc.
Dept. F-164, 130 West 31st Street, New York

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Without any obligation on my part send me the free book which explains Susanna Cocroft's new method whereby I may obtain an astonishing improvement in my complexion almost overnight.

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City.....State.....



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The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

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Munsey's Magazine	\$1.50	\$5.00
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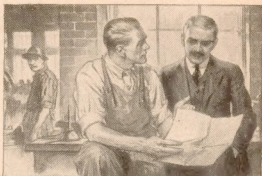
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Dinner for Cynthia

By **EDGAR FRANKLIN**

Author of "Regular People," "A Noise in Newboro," etc.

CHAPTER I.

WHERE?

"**D**O you say," Mrs. Ronalds inquired tensely, amazedly, of the telephone, "that he has not been there to-day?"

The voice at the far end of the wire evidently did say that very thing, for the second time now. Mrs. Ronalds's pale, normally rather frightened eyes, grew quite terrified. Her left hand trembled, causing the receiver to wobble oddly about her left ear; her right hand pressed emotionally to her sparse bosom.

"Not at all to-day?" she cried.

The voice, as it seemed, assured her that there was every justification for the "not at all." Still, Mrs. Ronalds had recovered herself.

"But he telephoned in, of course, to explain why he couldn't come to the office," she said. "Will you connect me with some one who can repeat the message to me? This is Mr. Ronalds's mother speaking."

The unobliging voice, it is to be suspected, indicated that he had not even telephoned in. An instant, terror returned to the lady; then she frowned annoyedly and sighed and shook her head; finally she smiled wearily.

"My dear young woman, you're absurd,"

she stated. "Let me have Mr. Halcomb's wire, please—yes, the general manager's wire."

Now, for a little, Mrs. Ronalds tapped her slim foot. Behind her, across the boudoir, a deep voice—although, deep as it was, the voice of another lady—demanded:

"Didn't show up at his job again to-day, eh?"

"Something important kept him away from the office, of course, mother," Mrs. Ronalds replied firmly.

"Tah!" said the deeper tone, rather disgustedly. "More likely he—"

"Oh—yes! Yes, hello!" Mrs. Ronalds interrupted. "Mr. Halcomb? Good afternoon, Mr. Halcomb. Mrs. Ronalds speaking. Neville Ronalds's mother, you know—yes. Er—Mr. Halcomb! The girl tells me that Neville didn't come to the office to-day; some very pressing business must have detained him, I know, because he *loves* his work there with you. But he was too busy to phone home, I suppose, and I'd appreciate it so much if you'd tell me where he is and—I beg pardon?"

The pale eyes dilated afresh; Mrs. Ronalds caught her breath.

"He did *not* telephone? Why, that's extraordinary, Mr. Halcomb! That's very extra—pardon me?" And this time the lady stiffened, indignation rising visibly, and listened for one full minute before "Well, Mr. Halcomb, it may indeed be the sixth time this month that he has done the same thing; I'm not in a position to contradict you, for I've a wretched memory—although I'm quite certain you're wrong, of course. But I am entirely sure that only matters of the most extreme importance could have kept Neville from his desk, at any time. Thank you. Good-by!"

She turned from the instrument, proudly; ten seconds, perhaps, she remained as proud; but after that Mrs. Ronalds seemed to sag and grow limp, as she gazed at her mother in the familiar, frightened way.

"Well, he hasn't been there all day!" she murmured.

"No, and he wasn't there all day yesterday, either, the little fool—and he wasn't home here last night!" the elder lady responded acidly.

Following which, she leaned upon her heavy cane and stared at her only daughter with a hard, grim smile; and her daughter stared back, weakly, tremulously, with hands tight clasped and no smile at all; and to one ardently interested in the study of contrasts this pair, staring so, must have furnished the perfect jewel of a specimen.

Cornelia Ronalds, widow of the late Randolph, albeit in all her forty-five years no solitary rough finger had ever been laid upon her, inevitably gave one the impression of a broken creature, long since beaten into complete submission to anything and everything. Pale she was and slightly stooped of shoulder, with an anatomy which no designer of New York or of Paris had ever been able to render even moderately striking, and a disposition more subdued, more gentle, than the disposition of the very gentlest dove in the whole world.

Some small part of this unfortunate effect had been the fruit of contact with Randolph, in his heyday quite the type of roughshod and dominating male; but the credit for most of it belonged to Cornelia's mother, who had been a conspicuous personality long before Randolph's birth and who was still overwhelmingly in evidence now that nine or ten crops of spring flowers had done their budding on Randolph's grave.

She was, by richly simple name, Jane Stone, relict of Jason, a high-powered person who had accumulated several millions in the most spectacular fashion and then had died young and without openly expressing any particular fear of what another world might have in store for him, after a decade of his Jane. Presumably, this lady had been born a cast-iron human; at a little past sixty the first spot of rust, so to speak, was still to appear.

Mrs. Stone was heavily built, although with very little adipose tissue; nowadays she moved slowly and with some difficulty; but mentally and physically she moved just as relentlessly as any steam-roller. Her cold gray eyes, overhung by quite startling brows, were brilliant and penetrating; her chin was square, her nose more a lump of terrific character than a mere organ. Much of her physique and all of her mind Mrs.

Stone had inherited from her father, Colonel Hawksford Halling, sometime of the Union Army—"Hell-Hound" Halling they called him in those lamentable old Civil War days. If you would understand Mrs. Stone herself more perfectly, look up what little of him has been written into history.

With Mrs. Ronalds's stifled gulp and Mrs. Stone's hard little grunt, the staring session came to an end.

"And he lied about where he was last night, too," the latter lady added, more or less pleasantly.

- Cornelia winced, as before a whip-lash.

"No! No, mother—he didn't really lie!" she protested. "Neville doesn't lie, dear. He's the very soul of honor. He—"

"Tah!" remarked Mrs. Stone under her breath, and glanced at the ceiling—a very pretty ceiling now, by the way, since the huge old Ronalds town house had been completely done over, and the slightly feverish frescoes and the plaster Cupids with the crumbling noses were all gone.

Tears suffused Cornelia's pale eyes; her hands clasped more tightly.

"But he is, mother!" she insisted, very earnestly indeed. "He didn't lie; there was just some misunderstanding. Towner took the message, you know, and—oh, dear!"

She reached for the button beside the couch.

"I want to ask him again," she exclaimed.

Mrs. Stone chuckled. This was a strange sound, a pregnant and expressive sound, peculiarly her own—neither an ordinary chuckle nor a derisive cackle nor yet a sneering throat-rattle, although it had certain elements of all three. When she made it, the right corner of her mouth came up momentarily in a weird, piratical twist.

"Well, I'll say for Towner that he knows better than to lie for the brat!" she observed rumblingly.

Into this rather elegant nook of a room, then, within the minute, came Towner, butler to the Ronalds household.

Oh, no, he was by no means the regulation old family retainer, with dignity and little sideboards and a near-English accent. Towner was merely a well-upholstered,

highly efficient person who had been with them now some six or seven years, a tolerant soul and kindly to the very last degree. Amiability radiated from his round countenance, radiated even through the foggy lenses of the little steel-rimmed nose-glasses, which latterly he had been forced to wear all the time. The sole outstanding feature about Towner lay in the fact that he was the only man living who had ever served Mrs. Stone for more than three months.

He bowed perfunctorily to Mrs. Ronalds, nominal head of the house, although one wary ear was cocked in Mrs. Stone's direction.

"Er—Towner," said Cornelia. "About Mr. Neville, when he telephoned yesterday. Just exactly *what* did he say, Towner?"

"Why, he said, ma'am," Towner responded, with really commendable patience, since this was the fourth time they had been over the episode, "that he'd be staying with Mr. Peter Weems overnight."

"And he said that Peter was with him then, did he not, and that he was about to go home with Peter?"

"So I took it, ma'am."

"So you took it! That's just what I mean, Towner!" Mrs. Ronalds cried petulantly. "Did he say that or didn't he?"

"He said that, ma'am."

"In just so many words?"

"In just so many words!"

Mrs. Stone snorted.

"Then why did Peter Weems call up at ten o'clock last night and ask for Mr. Neville, and say that he hadn't seen him for a week?"

Towner adjusted his glasses.

"That's a great puzzle to me, ma'am," he said guardedly.

"Was young Weems drunk as usual when he telephoned?"

Towner started and brightened instantly.

"Why—why, bless me, Mrs. Stone, I hadn't thought of that! Now that you mention it, I believe he was. He—he sounded that way and—"

"Tah!" Mrs. Stone broke in disgustedly. "So he *wasn't* drunk, eh? And Neville was—"

"No, mother!" Cornelia cried. "I'm

quite sure that Towner misunderstood Neville in the first place. Towner, are you *positive* you did not misunderstand?"

"Why, no, ma'am, I couldn't go into court and swear to it, of course," the butler said obligingly. "The name Weems sounded quite clear to me at the time, as Mr. Neville spoke it; but on the other hand the telephone plays queer tricks with sounds, sometimes, and it—it may have been some other name."

"You see!" Cornelia said triumphantly. "You were mistaken!"

"Yes, ma'am," Towner said, with a small, dreary sigh. "I'm very sorry it should have happened."

Jane Stone shrugged her wide, thick shoulders and shook her head. Her only daughter flushed a trifle.

"Now, Towner, since you were entirely mistaken about that, isn't it possible that you're mistaken in saying that Mr. Neville hasn't called up here at all to-day?"

"Well, it's possible, ma'am, yes—because anything's possible," the butler conceded. "But I may say that I've answered the telephone every time it's rung to-day, Mrs. Ronalds, and none of the parties mentioned being Mr. Neville, and none of 'em was using a voice anything like Mr. Neville's."

"Then he really hasn't called!" Mrs. Ronalds gasped, in a small, stricken wail.

"No, ma'am."

Cornelia controlled herself and nodded.

"That is all, Towner; if he does call, put him on this wire instantly."

So Towner went his long suffering way, and when the door had closed after him there was a thick, ominous silence of many seconds' duration. Mrs. Stone broke it with her sudden, short laugh.

"Stop wringing your hands!" she commanded. "Why the devil don't we face the fact? He's gone and done it this time!"

"Mother!"

"He's married the bobbed-haired hussy, whoever she is—and she's married a helpless pauper, and she doesn't know it yet."

"He—no, I don't believe that. I—and still, he never stayed away all night before, except when we knew exactly where he was, did he? And he's been acting so queerly lately, since he's been going about with

that—that woman. He never acted like that before."

"Oh, yes, he did!" Mrs. Stone corrected. "He went through the whole same string of idiotic tricks when that little Burgess rat had her sleazy hands on him. He mooned and he sighed and he sulked, just as he has been doing lately. He wouldn't tell us who *she* was, either, if you remember."

"I—I do remember!" Cornelia whispered.

"But Forbes found out who she was and I told him how to attend to her—and he attended to her!" the elder lady chuckled grimly. "Good lawyer, Forbes—a very bright chap."

Cornelia's whisper persisted:

"Mother, Neville *must* have lied when he said he was staying with Peter!"

"Of course he lied! They all lie when they're in love—and most of the rest of the time too for that matter. Well?"

"Well, mother?"

"Are we merely going to sit back and accept it with proper Christian resignation, and welcome his fortune-hunting baggage when he does eventually see fit to bring her home?"

"If he really has married the creature, what else is there to do?" Cornelia whimpered. "He—mother, I didn't tell you this, but last week Neville told me quite flatly that if I didn't stop questioning him about her and bothering him, he'd go and marry her out of hand!"

"He told you what?" Jane Stone cried tremendously. "Do you mean to say that things have come to such a pass that you let that spoiled brat *threaten* you?"

"He didn't mean to threaten!" Mrs. Ronalds said quickly, quiveringly, and dabbed at her eyes. "But he was annoyed and he's twenty-one now and a man, and I suppose he feels—"

"Never mind what he feels or doesn't feel," said her mother, and considered her darkly. "Cornelia, have you been nagging him since then?"

"Why—why, day before yesterday I asked him if he wouldn't tell mamma just a *little* about the girl."

"And he blew up again, eh?"

"He was frightfully angry."

Mrs. Stone shook her head.

"Well, it never pays to nag the Halling blood, Cornelia; you ought to know that by this time. *That's* what precipitated this mess, beyond question. He's gone and married a woman he's ashamed to bring home and show, ashamed even to tell about—and, by crickey, Cornelia, it's a good bit your fault!" she said hotly. "Hell's bells! The beastly little idiot!"

"Mother, we—we can't just cast him off!" Cornelia cried agonizedly.

Mrs. Stone relaxed somewhat and sighed and smiled sourly, almost wonderingly, at her daughter.

"Who said anything about casting him off?" she asked quite mildly. "We'll have to get him out of it."

"Can we, when he has—"

"I can't—you can't! Forbes can, because he knows how," grunted Neville's grandmother. "Call up his office, Cornelia, and say that I want him to get here without letting any grass grow under his feet."

She sat back and waited, muttering, while Mrs. Ronalds did her calling.

"Isn't there, eh?" she snapped.

"No. And they don't know whether he'll be back to-day or not," Cornelia reported. "He was going somewhere after he left court. We'd better send for somebody else?"

"We'd better not," Mrs. Stone said briefly. "He'll be here as soon as they can get in touch with him; Forbes hasn't got another client with three millions to be handled! Point of fact, there's no great sense in tearing about hysterically at this stage. Neville's done it, and it 'll take time and money to undo it."

Cornelia nodded, again and again, her eyes flooding with tears.

"Yes, he has, mother, hasn't he?" she echoed. "In spite of everything we've been able to do, that designing woman has married my little boy—my little Neville! Mother, I've lost him—oh, I've lost him now!"

And here grief quite overcame the poor lady and she sank down among the pillows and sobbed and sobbed. Some seconds, Mrs.

Stone regarded her offspring with moody disapproval; then she sighed and rose and moved slowly to her side.

"Well, don't make such a pother about it, youngun!" she said quite gently. "He'll survive—and she'll let go of him fast enough when she understands that I've cut him off. We'll have to pay her something, but—tah! That bobbed-haired, smoking, drinking type!"

"And she probably is just that, isn't she, mother?"

"Oh, unquestionably!" Mrs. Stone agreed gloomily. "Neville 'd never have brains enough to take up with a real girl, even if there was one left alive for him to take up with—and there ain't! However—"

She shrugged. Mrs. Ronalds mastered some of her emotion and sat up, clasping her hands and staring numbly across the room.

"And now we've nothing to do but wait—just to wait!" she breathed. "Just to sit and—wait!"

"Well, there's no need of making a three-act tragedy of it!" Mrs. Stone barked, in sudden exasperation. "The boy's married! That's all that's happened to him—he hasn't been crushed by a railroad train or run through a meat-hopper! Hang you, anyway, Cornelia! You're getting me as jumpy as you are yourself, this last six months, with your confounded brat and his crack-brained amours! You'll have me soon in such a state that—"

Perhaps she proved just then that the state had even now been attained, for it was a very pronounced start that Mrs. Stone gave, as the telephone bell tinkled delicately.

Mrs. Ronalds came up as at the sound of a shot, and reached for the instrument and cried:

"Yes? Yes? Yes?"

"Here's a party that 'll have a word of interest to you, ma'am," said Towner's voice. "I'll put him on and—"

"About—about Mr. Neville?" gasped Neville's mother.

"Yes, ma'am, and—"

More than this she did not hear, for the receiver had fallen from her nerveless fingers. It rolled to a standstill on the couch

beside her, and Cornelia, wild-eyed, faced her mother.

"I—I can't bear it—not the actual thing in—in words!" she choked. "I can't listen to it! I—I'm not strong enough to—to bear it! Mother, you—let him tell you!"

She extended the instrument.

"Urrrr!" commented Mrs. Stone, in substance, as she snatched it. "Hello!"

CHAPTER II.

SINISTER FACTS.

"YES, madam; just one moment, please," said Towner. "There you are!"

"Mrs. Ronalds?" queried the light, pleasing voice of a young man.

"Mrs. Stone!" that lady corrected. "Who's this?"

"Oh, hello, Mrs. Stone!" the voice said cheerily. "This is Harry Star."

"Oh?" said Cornelia's mother, and for a moment she really smiled. "How are you, Harry?"

"Fine, thanks. Neville asked me to call you up late to-day."

"Aha?" said Mrs. Stone, and ceased smiling suddenly. "Just where is Neville now?"

"Why, he's gone duck shooting, somewhere down on Long Island. You see, he left in a terrible rush yesterday afternoon; I think he was going out to Pete Weems's place for the night, but he met Mort Lester and that crowd and changed his plans on the spot. And—oh, he asked me not to call up and tell you till about five o'clock to-day, because his mother worries so when he's anywhere near a gun."

"Aha?" said Mrs. Stone once more. "Say, are you *sure* he's duck shooting?"

Young Mr. Star laughed outright.

"Gosh, no!" he cried in his hearty way. "Nev changes his mind so often that he may be up in an airship or down a coal mine by this time. But he borrowed my boots and coat and both my shotguns, so in all probability you'll be having wild duck for dinner pretty soon."

"Very likely—very likely," Neville's

grandmother mused, and sighed relievedly. "You don't happen to know when our little wanderer contemplates returning to New York?"

"No, I don't, Mrs. Stone. To-morrow or the day after, I believe. They have to motor out to the Hamptons when they've finished shooting and look over the new house Mort's father's building. Oh, he'll be home to-morrow, I imagine. You're not worried about him?"

"Not now," said Mrs. Stone. "Thank you for calling, Harry."

And then she turned and, hands on her knees, considered her aspen daughter with a scowl.

"You see!" she snorted. "You've done it again—worked up a scare out of absolutely nothing—and that time, by crickey! you had me as near the raving stage as you were yourself! He isn't married, Cornelia; he's shooting ducks!"

"Are we—sure of that?"

"We are, unless Harry's turned into a liar, and he hasn't. He's the cleanest boy I ever knew!"

"Except Neville, of course!" breathed Neville's mother. "Oh, I *knew* my little boy wouldn't lie!"

One great, trembling sigh of terrific relief escaped her. Mrs. Stone grunted wearily.

"Well, I'll say one thing for you, Cornelia," she admitted. "You made a thundering mistake in not bringing two girls, instead of a girl and a boy. You never kicked up any of these disturbances over Dora."

"Oh, but Dora was always so different, mother," Mrs. Ronalds replied impatiently. "She was so sober and steady, even as a little child. Now she's married to Tom, and all settled down and—but Neville's always been so temperamental."

Mrs. Stone nodded grimly.

"I'll say he has! Cornelia, listen to me. That kid's coming home to-morrow or day after, and when he gets here I'm going to have a private chat with him!"

"No!" her daughter said quickly.

"You'll be rough with him."

"I shan't be any rougher than the occasion demands, but we'll have an end of this

matrimonial rot. Why, you're going insane on the subject! Every time that boy's out of sight for more than six hours, you jump to the conclusion that he's married some harpy and—"

"Well! You jumped with me!"

"Maybe so, that time. But I've got a dollar or two to bet that it'll be the last time!" responded Jane Stone, as she rose and moved back to her favorite chair. "I'm going to jam that boy into society and make a deal with the mother of some decent girl to have him vamped and married, pronto! I'm getting sick of this!—Hasn't that jackass of a Towner brought up the evening papers yet?"

"The—oh, the papers?" Cornelia murmured softly, and smiled toward the window in her rapt way as she thought of Neville. "He'll be bringing them in a moment now."

"Gad!" puffed her mother as she arrived at the chair.

The frightful strain, you see, was over. Neville Ronalds had been definitely located, all unensnared, and reaction was upon them. In Mrs. Stone this reaction took the form of an intermittent rumble; Cornelia merely clasped her hands and smiled and sighed, again and again—and Towner appeared unexpectedly with:

"Mr. Forbes is calling, if you please."

"Is he?" Mrs. Stone chuckled, as she glanced at the heavy watch on her wrist. "Send him up."

"But we don't need him now, mother," Cornelia protested, when the butler had gone.

"We'll talk to him about something or other," the elder lady grinned. "If I've got that chap trained down so fine that he can get here within eleven minutes of the time I send for him, I can't tell him it's a false alarm or—ah! How de do, Forbes?"

"How do you do, Mrs. Stone?" smiled her attorney. "And you, Mrs. Ronalds."

The former lady looked him over approvingly; he merited approval. At thirty-five he was as clean-cut and energetic a person as ever graced the legal profession. His eye was clear and his chest was out and his hands were big and strong; there was no nonsense or diffidence and no lost motion

about Philip Forbes. He drew up a chair and sat down as Mrs. Stone observed:

"You're learning to move! It's not fifteen minutes since I sent for you!"

"I didn't know you'd done that," Forbes said cheerfully. "I've been meaning to stop in here for two or three days—and this afternoon I had business with a fellow on the next block. What's up? You think we're letting that Robinson affair lag?"

"I had some desire to question you about it."

"The office is looking after it and we'll have it all settled within the week," the attorney said briskly. "No, a more intimate matter brought me here—and before I go any farther, ladies, I want to say that I'm a lawyer, and not a private detective. What I did this time was done solely because both of you—or Mrs. Ronalds, at any rate—were so hugely concerned. I'm not going to do any more of it!"

"More of what?" asked Mrs. Stone. "What are you talking about?"

"Neville!"

"What? What about Neville?" his mother asked swiftly.

"And the girl!" Mr. Forbes supplemented, with a weary smile. "The one you've been worrying about so much lately—the one you've been consulting me about, off and on—the one Neville's supposedly on the verge of marrying. *The* girl, anyway, I assume!"

Mrs. Ronalds leaned forward tensely.

"Who is she?"

"I'm coming to that," Forbes said unemotionally. "I stumbled on them one night last week—Thursday, I believe—just leaving a restaurant. Neville didn't see me. They called a taxi and I acted on the impulse of the moment and called another and followed them to her home."

"And that is—where?" Neville's mother breathed.

Mr. Forbes turned several pages of his loose-leaf book and tore out one of them.

"That's the address," he said, passing it to Mrs. Ronalds. "It's a fairly good flat-house. I waited on the corner for a few minutes after they'd entered. I then went in and made an inquiry or two of the elevator man. She is a Miss Blair!"

Mrs. Ronalds's eyes dilated; she also swallowed audibly; but her smile was as brave as it should have been.

"But she—ah—*she* hasn't the flat, Mr. Forbes?"

"Pardon me?"

"I mean to say, it is the home of her parents, of her family—this flat?" Cornelia explained, with greatest difficulty.

"No—oh, no," the attorney replied, unconcernedly. "It is Miss Blair's apartment, according to the elevator man."

One of Cornelia's pale hands caught momentarily at her throat.

"Mr. Forbes, did—did Neville go to—the flat with this woman?" she forced from frozen lips.

"Blessed if I know," Forbes responded. "I didn't carry my inquiry as far as that."

"You're shielding him—he did!" Cornelia gasped. "Oh, my boy!"

Philip Forbes regarded her for a moment, much as Mrs. Stone had regarded her a little while ago. Then he sat up.

"May I be quite candid?" he queried. "I'm going to be, whether I may or not. Mrs. Ronalds, I suppose that almost any child of wealth lives under a handicap—to whatever extent—and when he happens to be the only boy in the family, with a nervous mother, he lives under a tremendous handicap. But recognizing the general condition, I make bold to say that in this specific case more sheer hysterical twaddle and poppycock are being expended on Neville than—"

"We understand all that, Forbes!" Neville's grandmother snapped. "What does the woman look like?"

"Why—I give it up. I saw her for a moment only, you know, face to face."

"Is her hair bobbed?"

"Can't even tell you that. She may be bald, for all the assurance I can give you to the contrary. She was wearing a hat. However, I *can* tell you that she is not a strikingly disreputable type, if that helps any. She struck me as a rather plain, rather nice-looking girl, not startlingly dressed or startlingly shabby or startlingly anything else!"

"And *that's* the most dangerous type!" said Neville's mother, with conviction.

"I suppose so," Forbes grinned.

"And—and Neville; did he seem infatuated with her?"

"That's a strong word, Mrs. Ronalds," the lawyer laughed. "At all events, he had a sort of death grip on her arm and he was doing all his talking directly into her ear—which, of course, is what prompted me to follow them in the first place—and there you are!" he concluded and prepared to rise. "Since Neville refused to reveal the lady's identity, and since you were so very anxious to learn it, I broke principle for once and learned it for you. And that ends my connection with the matter."

"Only it does not!" Mrs. Stone corrected dryly. "Don't bounce up, Forbes. This thing's going to be settled now and you're going to do the settling."

"You mean that I'm to go to Miss Blair and—"

"You bet I do!"

"Well, I'll do nothing of the sort," Forbes said serenely. "I attended to the matter of the little Burgess girl for you, and the bad taste is still in my mouth. I think she was honestly in love with Neville, and she's a sweet, common sense little creature who would have done him a world of good by marrying him. What is more, as you know quite well, Mrs. Stone, my office does not accept that sort of case or—"

"What the devil do I care what your office accepts?" the lady demanded, vigorously. "Do you prefer looking after this thing for me—or having me look up another lawyer?"

"You can't bully me, madam!" Forbes grinned frankly.

Seconds Mrs. Stone glowered; then she sighed and chuckled in her own remarkable way.

"You wouldn't be sitting there now, if I could, Forbes," she said. "All right then! I suppose your cursed principles will permit you to give us a bit of advice on the subject, as man to man?"

"That seems possible, at least," Forbes laughed. "What sort of advice do you want?"

"How to get him out of the woman's clutches, of course."

"Primarily, then, is he really in 'em?"

"Well, isn't he?" Mrs. Stone demanded, staring rather wildly, rather helplessly, at her daughter. "I thought that was what all the excitement was about."

"As if," Cornelia said bitterly, "there could be any doubt about that! And more dreadfully in them than even I had feared."

Forbes glanced at her impatiently and rose with a shrug.

"Why, there are just the conventional moves that are made in such cases," he said. "I don't know any new stunts. You might have her approached by some diplomatic person and sounded out. Let your son-in-law go to her—let Dale go to her, Mrs. Ronalds."

"That handsome fiend?" Mrs. Stone said very tartly. "He'd be more likely to make love to her himself."

"Some one else, then. Maybe she can be reasoned out of the whole proposition."

"When she thinks she's going to marry a fortune?"

"All right. Take that angle of it. Tell her that Mrs. Stone has determined to cuff Neville off without a cent, if he marries against her wishes. Tell her the boy isn't capable of making a living for himself and that if he wasn't working—or ostensibly working—in his own uncle's office—"

"Mr. Forbes!" Neville's mother cried.

"Oh, let him stick to the facts!" Jane Stone cried. "He's the only one who ever talks sense around here. Go on, Forbes."

"There isn't anywhere to go," said the lawyer. "If you can't have her reasoned out of it, you'll have to try buying her out of it. If that doesn't work—I don't know. You might try to do some more reasoning with young Neville, always bearing in mind, of course, that he's over twenty-one and legally sane, and that, if he's really determined to marry the girl, there's no way under the sun of stopping him."

It did not sound markedly helpful. Smiling perfunctorily, Mr. Forbes stood on one foot for a moment—and then on the other foot for the moment. Nothing could have been more obvious than the fact that his call was over. Mrs. Stone gazed gloomily at him.

"Forbes, Lord knows you must have

some chivalry and some sporting blood—and you've got a mercenary streak, too," she reflected. "Won't money, in moderation, tempt you to try eliminating this female from our family affairs—just this one female, Forbes, with the understanding that before it happens again we'll have looked up a professional eliminator?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"Inasmuch as I decline to make a brute of myself if this happens to be another decent girl really in love with Neville—or an idiot of myself if she chances not to be in love with him—or a trafficker in muck if she's really entangling him—no, money will not!"

"All right! Get out of here, then!" Mrs. Stone grunted, drearily.

"Do you know, I was about to do that very thing?" said the attorney, and they shook hands with greatest heartiness.

Just as the street door below closed after him, Cornelia Ronalds tore her delicate handkerchief in two. The faint little ripping sound startled her; she stared in astonishment at the halves; and then she gripped herself with great determination and faced her mother. The latter lady, scowling at the floor, was paying no heed whatever.

"Left us flat—blast him!" she observed.

"Well—at least, mother, we know the worst now!" said Cornelia.

"Yep! Flatter than a pancake! Hang him! Why couldn't he have postponed his beastly call till I'd looked over the papers and calmed down a bit? We're no sooner over one eruption than another starts! All right! Let him go! I can handle anything Forbes can handle!" Mrs. Stone rasped, in angry meditation, and folded her hands on her cane.

"Mother—a flat! The sort of woman who has a flat! It doesn't seem credible, does it?"

"Nope—doesn't!" her parent muttered, absently and without quite breaking down before the awful realization.

"And after all I've tried to do for Neville he *could*—oh, but it wasn't Neville's fault. She's dazzled him and fascinated him and lured him on, and he's only a sweet, innocent boy—hardly more than a child—hard-

ly more than my own little baby, even now! Neville—"

"*There!*" her mother cried triumphant-ly. "I've got his infernal name at last—Sneath!"

"Sneath?"

"Richard P.—or maybe it was Richard F. You remember, Corney—the man who engineered that slimy Kandrick divorce case. I read every word they printed about that thing from day to day, and it was disgusting; so disgusting that they finished it with the public and the press excluded, and I never did find out how it wound up, except that the Kandrick woman disappeared for good. However, from what came out, that man Sneath must be a genius in such things! We'll send for him and make a dicker with him and turn him loose on this girl!"

"And risk a scandal that might easily blast Neville's whole life? No!" cried Mrs. Ronalds, with unusual force and earnestness. "And it isn't necessary, mother. I have a better way."

"*You?*"

"Yes! Even—even a creature of this kind must have a better nature, don't you think?"

"Anything's possible, Corney."

"And where a man, particularly of this Sneath type, would never suspect its existence, that better nature could be reached by a woman, by a mother!"

"You mean that you're going to call on this damsel and plead with her not to marry the boy?"

"I—yes, I could do even that for Neville's sake, although it was not what I had in mind. I thought that I'd phone her and ask her to call here."

Mrs. Stone waved a large warning hand.

"Don't even think of it! She'd find out too much from your voice, Corney. Send her a note."

"Very well, then—a note."

"And make it smooth, Cornelia; make it oily!" her parent went on, with rising enthusiasm. "Smear it all over with honey, so that she'll bite hard and drop right into the trap. And when she does get here I'll take a whack at her! I'll show her a little old-fashioned—"

"No! That's one thing we must have understood now!" Mrs. Ronalds said, with the same astonishing firmness. "I must have her all to myself. This will need all the tact and delicacy in the world."

"And I haven't got 'em, eh? Maybe you're right, Corney, but first and last I've accomplished a lot in my rude way. Good enough! I'll keep out of sight till you've done what you can. Sit down and write your note. You're going to mail it?"

"I'm going to send it by messenger," said Neville's mother, and quite swept to her desk in the corner. "What time is it?"

"Just past five."

"Will a—a woman of that kind be awake now?" Mrs. Ronalds mused, and shuddered a little despite herself. "They sleep all day and carouse all night, do they not?"

"I presume so. But don't suggest anything like that in your note. You—"

Cornelia's smile was downright sly.

"Have no fear, mother; this note will be a masterpiece," she said. "This is to save my boy! I—"

Her voice trailed off. Pen poised, she gazed fixedly upward at the portrait of Neville's father—which, in sober fact, resembled nothing so much as the portrait of a particularly well-dressed coal heaver—and although a tear trickled down her cheek, her smile, persisting, grew inspired.

"Yes! Yes! That's it!" she breathed and wrote swiftly.

CHAPTER III.

SUSTENANCE.

AMONG all the bromidic and age-be-whiskered axioms, one at least shines forth as absolutely foolproof and incontrovertible—the broad proposition that, living, one is bound in whatever degree to learn.

To cite just one instance out of the uncounted billions, take the case of Nora Blair.

These last six months, Nora had simply learned and learned and learned! She had learned that one does not descend upon New York and inevitably become at once the

overpaid sensation of the artistic world. She had discovered that there were already in New York many, many artists, who were supplying every visible need and collecting for their labors; and that behind them marched another army of artists, who carried big portfolios and sat in anterooms, and never apparently supplied any need or collected for anything; and that even behind this army were a few stragglers like herself, who had recently come to the city. Nora, too, age and training considered, was a very capable little artist, who could draw anything from a classic figure to a seductive can label, and who had a very neat and satisfactory technique when it came to oils.

Or, again, take the case of Cynthia Blair, who had come to town with her Cousin Nora.

Cynthia, too, had learned, although not so much about art as about music, since Cynthia lived more or less for her piano. By this time she had learned that, through some strange trick of fate, every last child in the metropolitan district who has ever contemplated taking music lessons, had already engaged an entirely efficient instructor. She had ascertained also that, particularly at just this season, one is not booked for even the least important of concert engagements—nay, not even for the humblest little job as accompanist or a rather humble vocalist! And since so much about Cynthia seems to have leaked out, let the whole sickening truth be told: She had even established the remarkable fact that pianists in the smaller movie houses never relinquish their jobs until Old Age has laid his stiffening touch upon their fingers! This last bit of research had cost Cynthia something in the making and had netted her nothing at all.

By this time you will have deduced that things were not going so very well with a pair who had advanced upon the metropolis all full of youth's bright confidence and a decent consciousness of real worth. Your deductions will be most accurate: this was the sixteenth of the month and the rent of the two-and-bath-and-kitchenette was still unpaid!

Cynthia sat by the window, looking in-

terestedly down upon the street; there was a thin film of dust on the hired piano in the corner. But Nora Blair painted steadily, now and then speaking harshly of the light from the big, bluish bulb, but painting on.

Cynthia turned and examined the clock and smiled brilliantly at her cousin.

"My Billy 'll be here in another fifteen minutes!" she submitted.

Nora merely nodded! Cynthia drew a deep breath and the smile faded out into a rather awed expression.

"He'll be here to take me to dinner!" she added. "*Dinner!*"

"Umum," agreed Nora, and paused for a moment and examined her work.

"Darn it!" said Cynthia. "I wish I could think up some way of having him ask you to come along, without making it too obvious."

"You don't want me," Nora murmured.

"Of course, I'd just as soon have my Billy all to myself," Cynthia confessed and dimpled—and she was even lovelier when she dimpled, which is saying a great deal. "But this once, Nora—oh, I do wish he'd ask you."

Nora squinted malevolently at the bulb.

"Thank Heaven I mixed this red by daylight!" she said. "I—what, Cyn? I couldn't go to-night, anyway. I'm going to finish this thing for Morse before to-morrow morning if it kills me; and when he's taken one good look at it he's going to give me all the work in the shop!"

Cynthia gazed sadly at her cousin and kept to her own train of thought.

"You're just as hungry as I am."

"Well, of course, one doesn't live on soda crackers and corn flakes for a week without developing a certain edge on the appetite," Nora confessed, without much concern. "But I'm not as hungry as you are, you poor kid. I don't get as hungry as you do. Nobody could!"

"Because you've got more soul!" Cynthia sighed.

"Probably," Nora grinned. "Oh—did Smithers say anything about the rent when you ran into him downstairs to-day?"

"He didn't say anything; he looked a lot. Nora, he—he won't put us out of here, will he?"

"He'll try something like that pretty soon, unless one of us digs up enough to pay him," Nora murmured. And then she ceased her murmuring and dropped her brushes and whirled about, suddenly glorified. "And one of us *will*!" she cried. "We came here to beat the game, and we'll beat it without calling on anybody for help—and we'll keep a roof over our heads while we're beating it! Don't ever make any mistake about that, honey child!"

"No—Nora," breathed her cousin.

Also, she nodded assent to these brave words; and through several seconds Nora waited, for it was customary on occasions of this character for Cynthia to respond with a few more fiery, heartening sentiments of her own, after which both of them felt better. Just now, however, Cynthia's smile was growing far-away and dreary.

"Nora, it would be perfectly hideous to order onions, wouldn't it?"

"What?"

"With the steak, I mean. I'm going to order a big, thick steak. I—I suppose it would be unspeakable, but, somehow, I'd just about sell one arm for onions fried the way mother fries them back home, and—"

"Pah!" said her cousin, and returned to her painting.

"I know. I'm unworthy. I can't help it," Cynthia sighed, and consulted the clock again. "Oh, he ought to be here in eleven minutes now, if he hasn't been blocked anywhere!"

"Well, when he does get here," said Nora, growing mildly waspish in her exasperation, "why don't you borrow a ten-dollar bill from him and buy yourself a side of beef and a bushel of potatoes and—"

"Why, I'd die before I'd let Billy know that we're really hungry!" Cynthia cried, her usually sweet voice quite shrill with horrified amazement. "I would, Nora! I'd die before I'd let him know we can't even earn our rent and meals! I'm never going to tell him, even after we've been married years and years. He'd think I was utterly incompetent and— Why, I'd as soon think of asking Uncle Dan to help us!"

"I know," mumbled Nora, and bent closer to her canvas. "Then stop watching the clock, kid. You fuss me!"

"I didn't mean to," Cynthia said, submissively, and obediently took to studying the little silken frock as she smoothed it across her knees. It was a very pretty frock, too. Upon Cynthia, who could have adorned a gown of burlap bagging, it was positively ravishing; yet it was none too pretty to be worn for the delectation of the world's one perfect young man, William Brander.

You, of course, might not have been able to perceive the flaming perfection of this William. It was a quantity which had never penetrated to Nora's understanding, and she had seen him at close range a good many times. In Nora's too cool estimation William was merely a rather dark and rather handsome young man, some inches shorter than she herself fancied them, full of energy, always immaculate. On the other hand, she at least recognized that William owned a quick, hot temper, that he ran to unreasoning and unreasonable jealousies. It was Nora's notion that, unless all cranial and facial signs are deliberately mendacious, William could be quite a violent and elemental person when sufficiently roused. However, it was Cynthia, and not Nora that William was to marry some time or other.

Cynthia ceased smoothing the silk, glanced covertly at the clock, just once, and quietly opened the window and peered downward—and then closed the window with a slam and whizzed to her feet, all radiant.

"He's here!" she cried. "He just came in!"

"Your dinner?"

"My Billy!" said Cynthia, and ran to the outer door of the little suite and waited, hand upon knob—waited until the elevator came up and the door opened and closed again—waited until a firm, quick step came down the hall, and then, without restraint, threw open her own door and, ere he had more than crossed the threshold, cast herself into the very ready arms of William Brander.

Nora glanced over her shoulder just once and went on painting. She had witnessed this same performance a number of times before. Another minute and they'd be in

here, and she would be expected to disappear for a little—not the easiest thing to do in a two-room suite. Just now, however, there were crackers in the kitchenette and about half a bottle of milk—and, however much soul one might possess, it was unquestionably mighty near the conventional dinner time.

So Nora laid aside her brushes and her palette and, with a tolerably gay wave of one hand in Billy's direction, vanished into the trial-size kitchenette and closed the door. And William entered, one arm about his sparkling-eyed Cynthia, and Cynthia led him to a chair and palpitated:

"You sit right there, and I'll fix my hair and get my hat and coat in just one shake! Isn't it lovely out to-night, too? I opened the window a minute ago and sniffed the air, and I'm just champing—"

"Well, don't champ for a minute, sweetheart," William said oddly, and failed to sit down.

"What, Billy?" asked Cynthia, and paused on her way to the bedroom and was overtaken by William, who embraced her with:

"Dearest, would you be terribly disappointed if we didn't go out to dinner and a show to-night?"

"Why—why, Billy?" said Cynthia, somewhat dizzily.

"Because you won't be, Cynthia, when you know *why* we're not going!" cried William, almost in a shout, and excitement and happiness glittered in his eye.

"But I—I shall be!" Cynthia faltered.

"Think so, do you?" her beloved laughed; and now he did sit down and drew her to his knee. "Well, when you've heard the reason you'll get up and cheer with me, honey. *It has come!*"

"What has?"

"The big chance, Cynthia! The one every fellow gets just once, I guess. Old Horace Morton's in town to-night."

"Who in the world—"

"Is Horace? Well, he's the biggest thing in our line, Cynthia—and I've got just five minutes to tell you about him, and then I'll have to fly. I was going to phone, but I had to see you and tell you, face to face, darling. Cynthia, Morton's works out in

Cleveland are shy one superintendent. They had a fight with the fellow who has held the job for nine years, and he left last week! *What* do you think of that?"

"It doesn't mean a thing to me," said Cynthia uncertainly.

"It will, two minutes hence. You know all the trick ideas I've been working up, this last eighteen months, to cut down costs and raise efficiency and all that? I've talked 'em over four times now with Cameron, and just yesterday he said that they were fine and revolutionary, but that our plant's altogether too small to make worth while putting them into practice; and that, in any case, the old man would have a stroke and expire if he saw all those changes in the works. I didn't tell you about that last night, but it made me pretty blue.

"Then, this afternoon along comes Cameron with his bombshell. The Mortons, it seems, are seventeenth cousins of his; and last night he told them about me, and my whole system seemed to make a big hit. Cameron's a friend, Cynthia! Horace is staying at his brother's house here in New York, and he's going back on the ten o'clock train to-night. Well, Cameron won me a formal invitation to dinner, and if I can convince old Horace of just how right I am, between the soup and ten o'clock, the job's as good as mine."

He paused and shivered. "And, Cynthia, the salary starts at—*fifteen—thousand—dollars—a—year!*"

"R-r-really?" Cynthia gasped.

"Yes, my heart stopped for about half a minute, too, when Cameron first said it," William laughed. "But I guess my face didn't show anything. He seemed to think I took it almost too calmly. So that's that—and I've got it, honey—I *know* I've got it! If I can just get Horace and his brother alone for two hours and put my head absolutely on the job of showing 'em things as I see them, that job's mine."

"I'm—I'm glad, Billy!"

"You don't sound so terribly glad!" William submitted in astonishment.

Cynthia caught herself and smiled.

"Well, I—I'd ever so much rather have you talking to me than talking to them, over your dinner!" she said.

"You—well, gosh, aren't women the limit!" William laughed blankly. "It never occurred to me that you'd be disappointed, Cynthia; I thought you'd be plumb tickled to death."

"I am!"

"But you're disappointed, too."

"Well—if you loved me as much as I love you, and you'd been expecting—"

"Oh, you funny little kid!" cried William, and caught her to him and held her fast. "Fifteen thousand a year, instead of the three thousand we were hoping to get married on, and you— Well, I suppose girls are all like that. As if I didn't love you as much as you love me, honey!" William purred. "Darling, just think of it! If I get this, I'll go out there for a month and make sure that it isn't all a dream. And then I'll make a lightning trip back here; and when that trip's over, there'll be a new Mrs. Brander in Cleveland, Ohio. Whoops!" William cried unrestrainedly. "Isn't it wonderful?"

"Ssh!" said Cynthia.

Following this there was a blissful minute of utter silence, wherein presumably soul met soul. Then William returned to earth, and discovered that conscience was prodding, however slightly.

"You poor little kid!" he breathed. "Now you'll have to sit here alone all evening with Nora."

"Yes."

"If I hadn't sent back the tickets when I found we couldn't go, you and Nora could have used them. That was a kind of thick-headed thing to do, come to think of it."

"I wouldn't have gone without you, Billy."

"Yes, but, confound it, I hate to think of you just sitting here with your hands folded!"

"Well, that's where I shall be, Billy," Cynthia said, with pretty resignation.

"Wouldn't you like to—"

"I wouldn't like to do anything without you. I'll just wait and—maybe you'll telephone and tell me how it all came out?"

"I'll do better than that. I'll skip back here the second I leave Morton's, dear. And we can go around the corner to the pictures

and see what's left of the second show; and I can tell you all about it then."

"Fine!" said Cynthia brightly.

"And all the time I'm there, dearest, I'll be thinking of you sitting here and waiting for news that I've won," said Mr. Brander, as he prepared to depart. "And if I can't win out when I'm thinking of you, I'm not much good."

"Oh, Billy, whatever you do and wherever you are, you're the best and dearest and sweetest thing in the world!" responded Cynthia, who was quite an enthusiast on the subject of William; but for the rain of kisses that came upon her, she might have said even more than this.

"And I'll never disappoint you again, honey, not even for a fifty-thousand-dollar job," William stated in conclusion.

Thus they passed to the door. Within thirty seconds the elevator had taken William away from there. Cynthia moved slowly back to the center of the paint-perfumed living room. She was overjoyed at the great stroke of luck that was hovering just over her Billy—just over both of them, if it came to that. If Billy had rushed in here and told her that he was actually in possession of a fifteen-thousand-dollar job, no other thought could have entered her exquisite little cranium; so much Cynthia understood clearly. But, as a result of much personal observation, she knew how many thousand varieties of assorted slips the wicked old world keeps in stock, all ready to thrust between cup and lip. And, however blooming she might appear, she was really, literally weak and—

"Well! Well! Haven't you two gone yet?" Nora demanded briskly, emerging from the kitchenette and dusting cracker crumbs from her blouse. "Aren't you—huh? Where's Billy?"

"He just left," sighed Cynthia.

"You—you haven't quarreled?"

"Don't be silly. He was called away on business."

"Well, isn't he—er—going to take you out at all, young one?" Nora asked, with more than a suggestion of horror in her voice as she flicked the last crumb away hastily and, for some reason, avoided her cousin's eye.

"Not to-night," Cynthia responded, and forlornly attempted a light and casual effect. "Somebody wants to hire Billy at fifteen thousand dollars a year, Nora, and—and that's more important than playing around, isn't it?"

"Well—yes, naturally, if it's really so," said her cousin. "Only I wish you'd told me about it five minutes ago, before I—Well, it's too darned bad, anyhow," Nora concluded brusquely, and strode back to her easel.

Cynthia returned to her window and stood there watching; and, down below, William Brander sped across the street, turned for an instant to wave gayly in her direction, and vanished around the corner.

"Well, there—there goes my dinner!" Cynthia observed, with an attempt at whimsical gayety which ended in a little whimper.

"Eh?" Nora rasped.

"Yes; he won't be back till after ten, and it 'll never occur to him then that perhaps I'd like to—"

"Well, what if he doesn't?" the artistic member rapped out, with most unusual temper. "Don't you ever think of anything but food, Cynthia? Is food your whole world and your god and everything else? You're a perfect little glutton! You'd sell your soul for—"

"Why, I'm nothing of the kind!" Cynthia cried in hot amazement. "I'm not a glutton or a freak or a pig. I'm healthy and I'm hungry, and I'm not a darned bit ashamed of it! I've been so hungry for days I could have gnawed up the rugs, if we'd had any to spare."

"Yes, I—I know you have, kid," Nora muttered much more mildly. "I'm going to try to borrow five dollars from Morse to-morrow, if I can make it sound like a joke. Looks like sin, but I guess there's no help for it." She considered Cynthia morosely. "For about two cents I'd call up Uncle Dan and tell him about you and—"

"After all the nasty things he said to us when we first came down, about never being able to make our way, and being fools for leaving home—and probably figuring to fall back on him when we made

a botch of it? No, I'm starved pretty nearly to death, but I'm not as hungry as all that!"

"I know, Cyn. So far as I'm concerned, I'd let my bones rattle around inside my skin before I'd ever call on Uncle Dan for one thin dime; but you're different. You're younger and prettier and softer, honey; and he's rich, and he doesn't live three miles from here. Cussed and all as he is, he wouldn't see one of the family actually expire for want of a sandwich or two and—"

More than this Nora did not say just then.

With a pronounced start she ceased speaking and gazed toward the outer door; and Cynthia also started and also gazed, for on the far side of the portal some one had knocked sharply. There was nothing soft or friendly about this knock; it was just the sort of loud and peremptory rapping that might have been expected from the knuckles of a person arriving on unpleasant business.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BAIT.

NORA was dark. When, on rare occasions, she paled, it was to a very unpleasant sallow tint. Cynthia, lighter and rosier, had a way of turning white which was almost ghastly in effect. Just now, as she ran to Nora's side on the lightest of tiptoes, the chalky hue was upon her cheek, while Nora herself was a rather alarming yellow.

"That's Smithers!" Nora breathed.

"Yes—after the rent!"

"Yes. I've been feeling that coming all afternoon—I've been feeling it in my bones!"

There was a pause, wherein the knocking came again.

As one they shuddered, albeit Nora did essay a cynical, contemptuous smile.

"Well? Are we home, or are we not home?" she muttered.

"We're not! Oh, we're not!"

"I'm afraid we are, though," Nora sighed shakily. "He knows blamed well

we're here. You keep out of sight, Cynthia. I'll see if I can't stand him off for another week or two."

She started forward. Cynthia caught her.

"No—wait!" she whispered. "Let me do the talking this time. I can look a lot more helpless and appealing than you can, and if I have to cry a little it won't be a bit of trouble just now."

"Eh? There may be something in that, too," Nora conceded in a reluctant whisper. "Go on, then."

Cynthia hurried to the door. Nora, eyes narrowed, hands clenched, waited for the signal to plunge into battle—waited and waited, and then relaxed somewhat; for the familiar voice of Mr. Smithers had not floated from the doorway, and his considerable bulk was not looming above little Cynthia.

Instead, the prettier cousin seemed to be bending over a diminutive person, who said:

"Sign here, please."

Yes, and now she was closing the door, and turning back to the apartment, and in her hand she held an envelope of extremely heavy paper.

"What's that?" Nora asked bluntly.

"Note for 'Miss Blair,' Nora," Cynthia smiled rather weakly. "I suppose he thought he'd rather do it this way. It—it's sort of final, when they serve notice on you in writing, isn't it?"

"Don't ask me, child—I've never been thrown out of a flat before," said Nora. "I suppose, Cynthia, that— Why, that isn't Smithers's writing!"

"Well, it isn't Billy's. Whose else could it be?"

"And another thing: Smithers wouldn't be putting the full address on an envelope and sending it up by a messenger boy. That's a woman's writing, too, and it's a woman's stationery, and— Why, by golly, Cynthia, it's *money*!" Nora cried suddenly. "Somebody's sending you a hurry call to come and pump her brat's soul full of music!"

"Nora!" gasped Cynthia Blair, and lovely color flooded back to her cheek. "That's exactly what it is!"

And now pretty fingers quite madly ripped the thick envelope and tossed it aside, and the thick sheet was unfolded, and upon it sparkling and delighted eyes settled eagerly—and within another ten seconds these eyes had ceased their delighted sparkling. Cynthia's smile had vanished and there was only blank perplexity in its place.

"Well, but—this isn't for me—for us!" she stammered.

"What is it?"

"It's—why, listen to it, Nora!"

"MY DEAR MISS BLAIR:

"My dear Neville has hinted to me, his mother, that he is more than merely interested in a certain very lovely Miss Blair. My boy is very shy and reticent, but certain tender confidences of his lead me to think that some day you may be of our family. As soon as you can, while my boy is away shooting his ducks, won't you come for a comfy little chat with his mother?"

Just as blankly Cynthia looked at her cousin—and then looked in astonishment, for the reading had had a most remarkable effect upon Nora. Her face was one dark flush and anger glinted in her eye.

"Neville—Neville—hah!" she said. "Who signed that damned fool thing?"

"Why, Nora!" Cynthia gasped. "The name is 'Cornelia Ronalds'; but why—"

"Well, what d'you suppose that dirty little rat's trying to put over?" the elder Miss Blair snapped.

"What dirty little rat?"

"Neville Ronalds, of course!"

"Oh! *That's* the fellow who took you to—"

"Yes. Mary Horne wished the little beast on me last month. We've been out three times—three times too many, and the last time *was* the last time!" crackled from Nora's lips. "I may be Victorian, but I don't like to be pawed, and I don't like to have almost questionable things whispered into my ear. We threshed that all out downstairs last Thursday night, when he brought me home and thought he was going to insist on coming up here."

"Yes, but you must—must have been letting him make love to you, or something, if he's been telling his mother that you're going to marry him!"

"Well, Cynthia, not to horrify you by saying just what I feel, I assure you that I didn't let him make love to me—or anything. Before I'd— Oh, what's the use of getting mad about a thing like that?" said the elder Miss Blair, and caught herself and laughed bitterly. "I suppose there are a million like him, but I haven't had the bad luck to meet them. This isn't getting to work, is it?"

She picked up her brushes again. The rather startled Cynthia glanced from her cousin to the note which was plainly her cousin's.

"How are you going to answer this?" she asked.

"Answer it? I'm not going to answer it!"

"You—you could call up his mother and explain."

"Say, if I did that, Cynthia," Nora smiled wickedly, "I'd tell her exactly what I thought of her son, and if I did *that* Neville's dear mother—who's probably just as sweet as he is, and on whom I've never laid eyes—would drop dead in her tracks."

"But—"

"Oh, tear it up and forget it!" the dark Miss Blair said impatiently. "I want to get on with this thing."

Now she painted on in earnest, light or no light; and Cynthia strolled to their one really comfortable chair and huddled down gloomily, the note on her knees.

Minutes passed—and more minutes—and more.

"Nora," Cynthia said faintly.

"Yes?"

"Do you remember the time, when we were little, that we all went out to Grandpa Girtton's farm for Thanksgiving dinner?"

"Oh, yes."

"Do you remember that giant turkey?"

"Umum."

"Wasn't that a wonderful turkey, Nora, with the chestnut stuffing Grandma Girtton made for it, and the little tiny pork sausages she pinned all over it? Oh, *weren't they good?*"

"They—yes!" the elder Miss Blair said rather thickly.

"Uncle Jim Blair sent up the cranber-

2 A

ries from his own bog that year," Cynthia rambled on, with a strange, remote little smile. "Remember the jelly? And Aunt Sallie baked her special biscuits and all those marvelous little rolls. You liked plum pudding so much, Nora, and all the rest of the kids wanted pumpkin pie. Do you remember how polite you were trying to be about it, when grandma brought on that little bit of a pudding she'd made up just to surprise you? Do you remember—"

"Cynthia!" her cousin gasped. "Will you please stop? I'm human, you know."

"I didn't mean to—I—I—"

"Good Lord!" cried Nora Blair, as even again she cast aside her work and rushed to her cousin. "What's the matter with you now, Cyn?"

Nor was this query made without cause. Something definite and startling had happened to Cynthia Blair just then. Speech had died out, leaving her lips widely parted; her eyes grew round and staring; her breathing was not apparent. Briefly, it seemed that paralysis had come upon Cynthia, although now she spoke.

"There's nothing—nothing the matter with me," she said swiftly. "Only that I—I got an idea just then. Nora, you don't know this Mrs. Ronalds?"

"Thank fortune—no!"

"I mean, she doesn't even know you by sight?"

"Not so far as I'm aware."

"And your friend Neville, apparently, is off somewhere shooting ducks, so that eliminates him," Cynthia hurried on, with a glance at the clock. "And it's only a few minutes after six now—and I'm all dressed in my best."

Nora laid a steadying hand on the round shoulder.

"Honey, just what are you trying to say?" she asked concernedly.

"Why, that, so long as she doesn't know one Miss Blair from the other, you might let me go and call on Mrs. Ronalds right away, and explain that Miss Blair can't even consider marrying her son."

"Bah!" cried Nora. "Forget that drivell!"

"But, Nora, almost everybody here in New York has dinner about seven!"

"What?"

"And if I do go there in your place, I'll explain—oh, so nicely—and we'll all be friendly and everything. And I don't see how, in ordinary decency, they can avoid asking me to stay to dinner, do you?"

Nora's hands dropped; Nora's head shook slowly.

"Well, upon my soul!" she murmured. "Everything in the universe twists around in your mind to that one proposition of food."

"I'm sorry, Nora. I can't help it. Maybe it's false pretenses and not the nicest way to get a dinner—but I can't help that, either. It's better than throwing a brick through a bakery window, and I'm getting to a point where I could do that and glory in it. Nora, you wouldn't mind so very much if I just went there and impersonated you and—and all?"

"Mind? I don't give a hoot about it, one way or the other, child. I haven't even a flicker of interest in the whelp. I suppose his people are decent enough; I believe Mary said they were tremendously rich. But—oh, no, Cynthia; that stunt's a little too bizarre. There's no telling where it might end."

"Oh, but there is. It'll end with a nice handshake about twenty minutes after dinner's over, when I remember an engagement. And it'll be a lot of fun, too, Nora."

"You'll have to ride there. You know that we've got less than a dollar in cash between us, don't you?"

"But isn't the chance of a dinner like that worth the risk of one nickel?" Cynthia demanded feverishly. "I—I'll walk back if I don't get it."

Nora Blair pressed one hand to her forehead. There was a hint of insanity in her laugh.

"Well, we surely started something when we went about making our own way in the world," she observed. "Go ahead, if you must, Cyn. I don't believe anything can happen to you. Tell her you're Nora Blair, if Neville isn't around. It'd look rather queer and mysterious for me to be sending an emissary. And, by the

way, so long as you are going to do this thing, settle it in the lady's mind. I don't know just what the young man's been trying to do, lying about me to his mother, but I don't want any part in it."

Rather limply she watched through the bedroom door as Cynthia quickly patted down her very pretty and abundant hair and adjusted her smart little hat. Uneasy stirrings were with Nora as she watched the equally smart coat slip into place upon her cousin's dainty person.

"It's a kind of wild thing to try, kid," she submitted. "There's no telling what you'll get into."

"His people are all right, aren't they?" "Supposed to be the finest kind of people, but—"

"Then all I'll do is just hurry there and have my life saved and come right back," Cynthia replied, and kissed her swiftly. "And I'll go now, before you think up any real reason for my not going."

This she did. Seconds after the elevator had taken her down Nora stood looking dubiously at the door. Then she smiled, rather wanly, and shrugged. With no one to see, some of the indomitable force seemed to evaporate from Nora; she sighed heavily, and, doggedly shuffling, returned to her easel—paused and shut her teeth grimly for another moment—and went on painting.

Cynthia, on the other hand, gained new energy with every step. The air was particularly sharp and clear this early evening; she sniffed it, and the incomparable color rose higher in her cheeks. She—yes, with hope in sight, she was all alive again.

Perchance she should have been sorely troubled over the ethics of this whole procedure. She was not. Young adventure tingled in her veins; something like self-approbation came presently to cheer her further. She was really doing an act of mercy. Unless this mother was unlike all other mothers she had known, the positive assurance that her son was not about to marry a definite girl—unworthy as all the rest of her sex for this particular honor—would be a downright boon. One dinner is a very small price to pay for a genuine act of mercy. Cynthia laughed softly over

this conceit as she sped down into the subway.

She was smiling still when she emerged from the subway and hurried on.

Whatever the young man's failings, his people surely lived in a nice part of New York. With upper Fifth Avenue and Central Park at the far end of the block, these big houses were the homes of distinctly substantial citizens. Rather fervently, the prettier Miss Blair thanked her stars that she had made herself extremely presentable that evening for Billy's benefit—thanked them, too, that this particular crisis had not come six months later. Just now, since the wardrobe matter had taken a rather staggering bite out of their funds when first they came to town, both Miss Blairs were, in a limited way, very well dressed young women. What they would be in another half year, unless something delightful happened to their finances, was another matter altogether. But for to-night Cynthia was impeccable.

And this rather vast, old-fashioned house of sandstone must be the Ronalds home. Cynthia's eyes opened as she looked it up and down; her heart beat a little faster as she ascended the five steps; there was a very curious moment wherein plain terror swept down upon Cynthia and the impulse to flee became so strong that she all but gathered up coat and skirt and tore madly down the block.

But that passed as swiftly as it had arrived—and Cynthia pressed the button. And it wouldn't do to stand like this, staring at the door as if she expected an ogre to pounce out, would it? Cynthia Blair relaxed and turned to examine the aristocratic block with a languid eye, with just the sort of bored and uninterested eye that belonged to that particular block.

Well, they weren't so frightfully high and mighty that they were above using taxicabs, were they? One of these unornamental but useful vehicles was just shrieking its way to a stop before the house next door; Cynthia regarded it quite annoyedly.

And then Cynthia's lips parted and all the languid effect vanished; she stared at the taxi now with the most intense interest; she stood, indeed, quite rigidly. For there

was something vastly familiar about the young man in evening clothes who was just paying his fare—something that grew more and more familiar as he skipped up the steps and jabbed blithely at the button of the house next door and then turned and looked at Cynthia and—

"Why, B-b-billy!" Cynthia gasped.

"W—what?" cried the young man, with exactly the same sort of gasp, and swayed forward and peered at her. "Is—that you, Cynthia?"

"It—yes! I—what are you doing here?"

"This is Morton's house, of course," said young Mr. Brander, and there was an edge to his tone. "I—Cynthia, I thought that *you* were sitting home?"

"Well—yes, I—meant to do that, of course—" Miss Blair stammered.

And now Mr. Brander came to the edge of his steps and peered the harder, and even in the poor illumination of the street lamp yards away, it was entirely plain that his well-favored countenance was radiating dumfounded suspicion.

"Isn't that Ronalds's house?" he demanded.

"It—oh, yes! Yes!" Cynthia admitted, with a strange cackling laugh.

"Neville Ronalds lives there!" William added.

"Do you know—Neville?" Cynthia managed.

Mr. Brander glanced just once at his door. Apparently, nobody had as yet arrived to open it, just as nobody had as yet arrived to open the door for Cynthia.

"No, I'm proud to say, I don't!" he hurled across the space between them. "But I know of him—and I see that *you* know him!"

"But, Billy, I—"

"I don't know what to make of it, Cynthia!" William stormed, in a furious undertone. "You never lied to me before—or I never caught you lying to me before! You've never even mentioned knowing those people—knowing that cur!"

"But Billy, I—I don't! I—"

"Then what are you—" William began and stopped short. One second he glanced toward the door, which was opening at last.

Another, his fiery gaze bridged the gap between them and it seemed that William was about to leap through space and seize his Cynthia. Then, with a gulp which Cynthia caught quite clearly, William straightened up and faced the home which housed, presumably, his business future.

And the door just beside Cynthia was opening, too, and a kindly, rather stout butler was inclined inquiringly in her direction—and Billy had vanished into the house next door!

Cynthia entered.

CHAPTER V.

OLD-FASHIONED PEOPLE.

IT was very quiet and spacious in here, Cynthia sensed in the vaguest way. Her knees were shaking; Billy—her Billy!—had accused her of lying to him, of actually coming here to call upon a youth for whom nobody seemed to have a good word! And he had been rough and furious; he had dared to be rough and furious, if one wished to put it that way, although Cynthia was not conscious of any desire to frame the thought in just that fashion.

Of course, being human, they had had their overheated little passages before this evening—very brief ones always and very promptly buried in repentant kisses. All brimming with force, William possessed rather a hair-trigger individuality, and Cynthia herself was far indeed from the purely oyster temperament. But never had he spoken to her in that tone or looked at her like that! Although one could not well blame Billy. Almost the last thing she had said to him, there in the flat, was that she'd be sitting home, all forlorn, and—

"Er—to see Mrs. Ronalds, miss, if you please?" Towner hazarded, ever so blandly and it was clear that, at very first sight, he approved of Cynthia.

The caller started out of her dream.

"Why—why, yes!" she responded, gushily. "Will you just say that Miss Blair has come?"

"Miss Blair," the butler murmured, and bowed her into the reception room and went his way.

"Phew!" breathed Miss Blair.

Perfectly ridiculous, though, to get into such a state over such an episode, wasn't it? Billy had been tremendously startled at the sight of her and, as the most natural consequence, unduly energetic. Even before this, he would have calmed sufficiently to know that, however unusual matters might appear to him, they were quite all right so far as Cynthia was concerned, for the sole and excellent reason that Cynthia was Cynthia.

When he appeared at ten, she'd have to explain. Yes, and she'd have to tell the plain truth, too, and for that she was both glad and sorry. On the one hand, Cynthia detested the very idea of keeping even the tiniest detail of anything a secret from her Billy; on the other hand, reciting the facts meant admitting quite frankly that, up to date, both Nora and she were total failures. So there, apparently, was the penalty she would have to pay for her bizarre adventure; and so long as it had to be paid now anyway and was not a matter of life and death in any case, she might just as well dismiss it from her mind and enjoy to the full whatever lay ahead.

Cynthia, then, smiled just a little wistfully at the wall, somewhere beyond which was her Billy, and sniffed inquiringly. Curious indeed—but the kitchen of this rather elaborate home must have the most perfect ventilation; there was not even a suggestion of dinner on the still air. In a house like this, they'd have electric blowers and all that sort of thing; yet if the cook down below had known just what manner of maiden was sitting up here, he or she must surely have turned off the power for a moment and opened the door, just a crack!

From some distant point in the house, chimes apprised Cynthia of the fact that quarter of seven had arrived. She sighed delightfully.

And now, as to just what she meant to say to the probably disturbed lady who would soon appear? Oh, the good old simple truth again, of course, except that she would be speaking as Nora; that part didn't matter so very much, just so Mrs. Ronalds understood and the next quarter hour was safely bridged. There was no

need for acting or pretending anything; she'd simply be herself.

"If you'll come upstairs, Miss Blair?" Towner suggested.

Cynthia smiled sweetly upon him and arose. Towner also smiled, benevolently as any Santa Claus.

"She is here, mother!" said Cornelia, and her hands clasped tightly together. "Mother, *she is here!*"

"So Towner said, and so am I here and here I'm going to stay!" Mrs. Stone grunted.

"Oh, but you mustn't do that!"

"Oh, but I must," her mother said, rather sourly. "You're not fit to handle this job alone. You've been too much pampered, if I have to say it myself. You don't know anything about this type of female. She'll do as she pleases with you and—"

"Mother, she will not! Won't you believe that? Mother, this is for my boy!" Cornelia said, quite tragically, and laid a cold hand on either of her parent's broad shoulders. "The mother instinct tells me that I must do this thing alone—and I am strong now! Won't you please go and leave me to deal with her in my own way?"

"Well, d'y'e suppose I haven't got any mother instinct myself?" Mrs. Stone demanded, irascibly. "D'y'e suppose I'm sticking my fingers into a mess like this for the fun of it? Still—maybe you can manage it, Corney. I'll be somewhere near; send for me if you need me," she concluded and headed reluctantly toward the door. "Only dispense with the namby-pamby preliminaries! Open up with your big guns the second you lay eyes on her and blow her to bits! If you have to buy her off, don't make any dicker whatsoever until you've sent for me, Cornelia—and it'd be a good scheme to bear in mind that—"

"Mother, she's coming! Didn't you hear that bottom step creak?" Mrs. Ronalds hissed.

Alone, she clasped her hands and wrung them—and then resolutely unclasped them again. She drew herself up proudly and squared her shoulders. It was woman to woman now, you see, and Cornelia knew perfectly well that virtue must triumph, and so became a woman of steel. She was,

indeed, so filled and thrilled with the consciousness of virtue that for a few seconds she experienced a sense of suffocation.

And then, although the effort racked her, Mrs. Ronalds summoned to her lips a quiet and perfectly assured smile and forced her tense muscles to relax. She would need guile; well, she had that now—an incredible quantity of guile. The most fatal thing possible, also, would be to show fear before this creature. Cornelia's smile became lazier, became almost amused and just touched with contempt. She listened with pounding heart to the approaching steps; then she sank gracefully into a chair and picked up a book. Any one looking at Cornelia just then would have known instantly that a minor annoyance was about to be disposed of with deft dispatch!

The door opened.

"Miss Blair!" Towner announced gently.

Now, as some one entered and Towner closed the door gently, Cornelia seemed to find difficulty in dragging her attention from the book. She finished the line and prepared to glance up—after which, when she came face to face with the creature, she would rise suddenly and stiffen. Thus would the creature be warned at the outset that her true character was entirely apparent and that there were only rocks ahead.

So Cornelia glanced up at last and she did indeed stiffen, although not at all in the way she had intended. This stiffening process, in fact, was one of the most natural and convincing things Cornelia had ever done. Her mouth opened, her eyes became dumfounded circles. An instant, she frowned and blinked, and then took her second good look at Cynthia.

"Why—why, you're respectable, I think!" she gasped, with infinite tact.

Cynthia started and her own lips tightened.

"Thank you, I hope so!" she said.

"Oh, but I—I didn't really mean that, you know—" Cornelia stammered.

"No? I'm sorry that you did not."

"But I mean to say—that is—of course I did mean it, but the—the astonishment—that's what I'm trying to apologize for," Mrs. Ronalds explained. "This is Miss Blair?"

"It is."

"Well—ah—I am Mrs. Ronalds, of course. I am Neville's mother and—and won't you sit down?" that lady said lamely. Her brain, it may be admitted, was in a whirl. Her whole attack seemed to have crumbled; for no one, of whatever degree of intelligence, could gaze upon Cynthia without sensing that she was absolutely everything that the nicest possible girl could have been! In a way, this was really too bad; Mrs. Ronalds had known exactly what she meant to say, in the way of an opening. It had been her intent to drop her book, to rise hastily, to glance quickly up and down the visitor and then, permitting loathing to appear in her eyes, to say in a low, vibrant tone:

"So you—you are the creature who has ensnared my boy?" And after that she had meant to laugh, pitching the laugh to a high, derisive key and filling it with that utter contempt which must indicate the absence of all fear, and to add wonderingly: "Oh, but it's not possible! You're not *really* the Blair woman about whom we've been so concerned?" And then she had meant to laugh again.

Instead, Cornelia was merely sitting weakly on the edge of a chair, with her hands clasped and her lips still parted, gazing in a benumbed way at Cynthia, who sat back quite comfortably in another chair, a very sweet and wholesome and entirely self-possessed young woman.

"Won't you—er—take off your coat?" murmured the outraged mother. "It's rather warm in here."

"It is, isn't it? Yes, I will for a minute," responded Cynthia, and nimbly divested herself of the garment and, in her cheery, modern way flicked off the little hat as well and patted down her hair.

Also, she noted by the small clock on Mrs. Ronalds's desk that the hour still lacked twelve minutes of seven o'clock and salvation. It might be well to make the queer little conversation as protracted and roundabout as possible.

"It is—er—rather chilly out to-night, isn't it?" was Cornelia's next murderous javelin.

"Rather, although—I don't know," Miss

Blair dimpled charmingly. "It isn't nearly as chilly as some of the nights last week."

"No. Last week was decidedly unpleasant," Mrs. Ronalds agreed, profoundly.

"But the week before!" exclaimed Cynthia.

"Oh, the week before was perfectly beastly!" Neville's mother said.

This seemed to exhaust that particular topic, unless she chose to work back to the previous summer and even to seasons before that. Cynthia glanced about—and found that she had no farther to glance than the little stand beside her, for:

"Oh, what a darling vase!" she cried.

"That one?" murmured Mrs. Ronalds.

"Oh, *may* I examine it?"

"Er—of course."

"Because I do adore old china!" Cynthia breathed raptly, and approached the vase with reverent fingers.

"That is—is quite old, I believe," Mrs. Ronalds nodded.

"Why, it's a genuine Ming piece, isn't it?"

"I think so. I've never really been much interested in such things," Neville's mother confessed, and cleared her throat. "My husband collected a little."

"But this is exquisite—exquisite!" Cynthia murmured.

Two full minutes she devoted to a more careful inspection. During this period, Mrs. Ronalds sat in the same position, gazing blankly at Cynthia. She was wholly baffled. From the instant that Towner had announced Miss Blair's arrival, she had known that a designing woman was about to descend upon her and that, virtue or no virtue, it was going to be nip and tuck as to which of them came out on top in the struggle. But if this pretty creature was a designing woman, her true character was masked so perfectly that—that—well, really, what *did* one do in a situation of this kind?

For her own part, Cynthia went on examining the vase and regretting the thoughtless Fate that had failed to render Mrs. Ronalds a Ming enthusiast. Cynthia knew four separate disputed points about that dynasty, each of them good for a lively, time-consuming discussion. However,

since at a guess not particularly shrewd, the rather colorless matron in the chair had never heard of even one of the four, Cynthia set the piece down carefully and cast about for further material.

There was one painting over in the corner which looked as if it might be worth a few raptures. Or, without bothering to cross the room, she could cry out in further delight and stoop and, quite justifiably, effervesce over the bit of Eastern carpet upon which she was standing. But there was something about Mrs. Ronalds which suggested that she had not summoned Cynthia to enthuse over her art works—that, in fine, she would prefer to talk of the present.

So Cynthia sighed and dimpled and resumed her chair and said:

"Well—I had your note, of course."

"Yes," said Cornelia.

"And I came at once."

"Yes," repeated Cornelia. "Er—thank you for coming so promptly."

"I thought that was best. That is, I thought you'd rather hear about it as soon as possible."

"Yes," said Mrs. Ronalds, and braced herself slightly.

"Just what," laughed Cynthia, "made you think that I was going to marry your son Neville?"

"Why, I—I inferred that, from what he said. He is very reticent, you know—or perhaps he isn't with you?"

"Well, he's not only reticent, but inaccurate also, or else, Mrs. Ronalds, you misunderstood him. I haven't the slightest intention of marrying him—and I'm quite sure that such an idea never entered his head, either."

"But—"

"Never!"

"But he—he must have asked you to marry him!"

"Why must he?"

"Because he—because I—"

"Well, he never suggested such a thing to me, at any rate," Cynthia laughed. "If he really told you that—"

"Oh, the mistake must have been mine," Mrs. Ronalds said quickly. "Neville doesn't lie. He's the very soul of honor!"

"Of course. But whatever the misun-

derstanding may have been, I thought I'd better hurry a little about dispelling it. It's rather absurd for a girl to discover that a man she hardly knows is going around announcing their engagement, isn't it?"

"Absurd—yes. I can't understand it at all!" Mrs. Ronalds murmured. "Er—Miss Blair, will you pardon one question?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, then—I hardly know how to put this, but—are you *quite* sure that you have told me everything?"

"Meaning that I'm holding back something or other for purposes of my own?" Cynthia asked, evenly enough.

"No, no! Not that at all; I hadn't meant to imply that. But under certain conditions, you know, young people frequently are very secretive!" Mrs. Ronalds suggested slyly. "It occurred to me, since my dear boy has been so deeply affected as to feel some diffidence about telling even his mother, that possibly this might have been one of those very sudden and violent attachments that rather frighten everybody concerned?"

"It wasn't, though," Cynthia laughed. "Indeed, it would be much nearer the truth to say that I'm not actually acquainted with your son."

Cornelia's head went a little to one side. She smiled up at Miss Blair most encouragingly.

"Because you needn't have the least hesitation about 'fessing up now, you know. Really, you're not at all what I expected you to be—Well?"

"Well, if that's a compliment, thank you, of course," said Cynthia. "But I can't very well confess to something that never happened, can I?"

"You—no, I suppose not," Mrs. Ronalds conceded, helplessly. "I'm—quite confused, you know."

"That's rather natural," the caller dimpled. "I was a bit astonished myself when I read your note and learned of my engagement."

She stole another glance at the clock. The clock was moving along in the most obliging way. Within three or four more minutes, if this was one of these conventional and perfectly regulated households

of wealth, a distant gong ought to ring cheerfully or the amiable butler appear.

Cynthia reached for her hat.

"However—we've annulled the engagement now, haven't we?"

"I suppose so."

"Then that's that!" Cynthia concluded, and rose and beamed upon Mrs. Ronalds. "And the next time a young man's engaged to me, I hope that he'll let me into the secret, too."

"But—but it isn't that!" the lady cried hastily. "I mean to say, I can't grasp at all how this happened in the first place. You must help me, by thinking back. Something may have been said, possibly in jest, that gave Neville the impression that you had accepted him. I'm quite certain he had that impression, Miss Blair; I know my little boy very well, and I know how he has been acting lately. Indeed, his behavior has been so very strange that I was most anxious to see you while he was away and learn the whole truth and—and I'll think back, too, and see if I cannot take some of the blame."

Cynthia's hesitation, in the way of replacing the hat on her head, was the very prettiest thing.

"Well, at some other time, perhaps?" she suggested.

"You've an engagement now?"

"I? Oh, no. Not for another two or three hours, at least," the caller responded, with the utmost readiness.

"Then, if you please, pray be seated again, Miss Blair."

"No!" Miss Blair said firmly; and drew one short, deep breath and steadied her voice and added: "I shall be delaying your dinner."

She smiled again, entrancingly—and slowly ceased her smiling.

Remarkable as it might be, this woman was gazing up at her with a total lack of comprehension, as if the very word itself were unfamiliar and she found a moment's thought necessary before grasping its full meaning! Then Mrs. Ronalds raised a thin and deprecatory hand.

"Dear me, no!" she protested.

"Ah," Cynthia said sweetly, "I fear that you're just being polite."

Mrs. Ronalds shook her head emphatically.

"You're mistaken—really you are," she insisted, in her earnest way. "You see, Miss Blair, we are a very old-fashioned family. Sometimes I think that we're the last old-fashioned family in all New York."

"Er—yes?" Cynthia murmured ecstatically.

Because the gates were opening! No crystal gazing was necessary, to know that this was the prelude to an explanation of the too simple meal to come—just a soup and a roast, of course, with none of the cheap frivolities and fancy trimmings that count so little.

"Yes, indeed," sighed Mrs. Ronalds. "Mother prefers it so, you see, and things are usually as mother prefers to have them."

Cynthia nodded rather perplexedly.

"And so, of course," concluded Mrs. Ronalds, "*we* have dinner in the middle of the day!"

CHAPTER VI.

CHOSEN.

"YOU—you—what?" escaped Cynthia.

"I say, we have dinner in the middle of the day, Miss Blair—about one, that is—and a very light supper at six, unless we happen to be entertaining, which is very rarely. So, you see, you needn't have the least hesitation about staying on that account. You must just sit down and—"

For that matter, Cynthia was already sitting down.

Quite automatically and largely because the unreliable knees were threatening to give way again, she had returned to her chair. And the painting in the far corner had turned strangely foggy and was swaying about drunkenly; and beside Cynthia, where there had been a single Ming piece but a moment ago, there were half a dozen, all shadowy and uncertain of outline. Because they dined in the middle of the day!

Well, with a little less enthusiasm and a little more quiet thought, she might have foreseen it easily enough. That was the

way things had been happening ever since they came to New York—you fancied that you had this or that in your grasp and, lo! it wasn't there at all. Only Billy remained constantly glorious and real— And after coming on this idiotic adventure and meeting him so unexpectedly and rousing him as she had, even Billy might vanish! Briefly, Cynthia shuddered and turned cold.

Further, she had expended a precious nickel in transportation and another would have to go to taking her home, for Cynthia no longer had the strength for walking. And the long and the short of *that* was that to-morrow, or at the very latest the day after, the ambitious cousins would do one of two ghastly things. Either they'd abandon their careers, admit that they were incapable of self-support and wire home for railroad fare, or one of them would make her initial visit to a pawnshop.

Not, be it said, that there was so very much to be pawned, unless they took their actual clothes. There was Nora's gold ring and the old jeweled watch that had been her mother's; she'd never part with that watch, though. And there was the beautiful little timepiece on Cynthia's wrist; that would be the first thing in all probability to go. When they'd spent the proceeds from that—

"—or Neville may have thought so," Mrs. Ronalds seemed to be babbling along, as the furniture settled down and the fog began to clear. "Indeed, don't you think it *was* that?"

"I—yes, I think it must have been!" Cynthia agreed dizzily. "Really, I must go now, though."

"Oh, but I thought you were to help me think back?"

"We all make mistakes," Miss Blair said enigmatically.

"And—and that means?"

"Doesn't mean much of anything, I—" Cynthia was beginning drearily, as she turned toward the door.

More than that she did not say just then, for the door was opening and her eyes were growing round. Cynthia was gazing upon one of the most impressive women she had ever seen—a broad and heavily built lady, with hawk eyes and strong features who

glanced at her for one flitting instant and then glowered at Mrs. Ronalds with:

"Not getting very far, I take it? Where's the woman?"

"Well—"

"And who's *this*?" Mrs. Stone inquired very bluntly, and looked quite fixedly at Cynthia.

"Why, that—that is Miss Blair!"

"Miss—what?" demanded the elder lady. "This girl?"

"Yes!"

"*This* is the girl Neville's set on marrying?"

"Oh, no," Cynthia smiled, wearily. "You see—"

"*This* girl?" Jane Stone said, even again; and her astonishing eyes began at Cynthia's feet and moved slowly upward. An uncanny change came over the lady as she did this, too; light reached her rather forbidding countenance and her eyes sparkled. "Why, that's not possible! That—well, by the piper that played before Moses!" Mrs. Stone concluded, loudly. "*Her hair's not bobbed!*"

Cynthia merely nodded, with another weak little smile. This elderly lady, so far as one could judge by externals, seemed to be quite a personality; at another time and in a happier frame of mind, she would have interested Cynthia immensely; just at present, however, the sense of complete defeat was so strong that she yearned only to flee—to get out into the dark street and be alone.

"My mother, Mrs. Stone, Miss Blair," Cornelia murmured.

Mrs. Stone, with one emphatic bob of her head, advanced quickly, with the relentless effect that Cynthia noted with an unaccountable little shiver, and with one hand outstretched.

"I'm mighty glad to know you, honey!" she said heartily, and gripped Cynthia's little pink paw. "Almighty glad, by crickey! Upon my soul, I never suspected that Neville even knew a girl like you!"

"Well, he—"

"Yes!" cried Mrs. Ronalds, bridling instantly. "You've always made a point of believing that the girls Neville likes—"

"I've seen one or two of 'em, haven't I?"

the elder lady chuckled, and surveyed Cynthia again and then turned back to her daughter. "Well, you thought she was the biggest disaster that ever walked on two legs, didn't you, Corney? I call her a stroke of luck! Why, I had no idea there was a girl like you left on earth, child! You've got your hair—you're not smeared with paint—you wear clothes that look as if they belonged to a self-respecting Christian! It—it's a downright shock!" Mrs. Stone said, with another and quite terrific chuckle. "That's what it is—a delightful shock!"

"Well, thank you, of course, but—"

"And to think that boy's got sense enough to marry a girl like you? I don't understand it; it doesn't seem natural!" Mrs. Ronalds's mother muttered further, and fairly bathed Miss Blair in her powerful approval.

"Well, natural or not, it isn't so!" Cynthia said desperately. "That's what I'm trying to explain to you, too. I have no intention of marrying him!"

"Huh? Why not?"

"Because—because—well, I suppose the most convincing thing is to say that he never asked me to!"

"Why say that, when it's a lie?"

"When it's what?" gasped Cynthia amazedly.

Mrs. Stone shook one big forefinger at her playfully.

"Tut, tut, tut!" said she. "I know people, my child; I know 'em like a book; and I *always* know when they're lying—particularly when they're such clumsy little liars as you."

"But I assure you—"

"Oh, come, come!" Mrs. Stone pursued comfortably. "Ingrowing form of maiden modesty, maybe, but what's the sense of it around here? The boy gave his mother to understand, in some roundabout way of his own, that he was going to marry you; since he isn't an idiot, that implies, I should say, that he had asked you and you had given the necessary consent. So, whatever your silly reasons for all this shy fiddle-de-dee, let's forget about 'em here in the bosom of the family!"

"But—"

"Confound your buts!" the personality cried, quite energetically. "I think you're lovely—exquisite! I think you're ten thousand times more than we hoped for. So does Neville's mother—don't you?"

"Of—of course!"

"Then that's enough, isn't it? There's no one else to be consulted."

She laid a heavy and caressing hand on Cynthia's round arm; not without effort, the owner of the arm steadied herself and smiled wanly.

"Well, that's very nice of you," she contrived. "But I think we—we're all a little bit confused this evening and—why, some other time, we'll talk it over and get it all straightened out and laugh over it, I mean—some other time. Just now I must go."

"Go where?" Mrs. Stone asked, in displeased astonishment.

"Home!"

"Why?"

"Well—er—I have an engagement."

"But not for another two or three hours, you said," Mrs. Ronalds suggested.

"Why—no, not for another two or three hours, of course."

"Well, you're not going to run away until you and I are better acquainted, my dear," Mrs. Stone announced decidedly and frowned from her daughter to Cynthia and back to her daughter. "What's the matter with her? How in the world did you ever get things muddled up like this?" she rasped impatiently. "Girl seems to have reached a state where she doesn't know what she's talking about. Neither do you."

"Why, mother—really! I—"

"Oh, you come along with me to my quarters, honey," said Neville's grandmother, and tightened the grip on Cynthia's arm. "You and I'll talk this over."

"But—but I think I'd better go!" Cynthia said quite wildly.

"And I think you'd better stay for a while," the other insisted, and there was a whimsical and slightly sad quality in her smile which struck curiously into the caller. "I'm a lonely old woman and I don't see many congenial people. I'd appreciate a little visit?"

The pretty Miss Blair looked about her for inspiration. There was none. She

looked at Jane Stone, then, and her tender heart softened suddenly. An odd person she was, to be sure; but after fifteen minutes of her own with Mrs. Ronalds, Cynthia felt that, to whatever small extent, she understood.

"Come along, you beautiful young one," grunted Mrs. Stone. "If you'll let me take your arm, we'll move a bit faster."

Indeed, they were doing that very thing. They were making for the door—passing through the door—moving down the wide corridor toward the front of the huge house. And now another door had swung after them and they were in an apartment unquestionably Mrs. Stone's.

It was big and square, with an equally square bedroom visible just beyond. It was furnished severely, in heaviest of old black walnut and with two or three big, well-worn leather chairs. Into one of these the peculiar lady sank, motioning Cynthia to another. She grinned at Cynthia in the most knowing way.

"Now, my dear! Out with it!"

"Out with what?"

"The truth!"

"But I've been trying to tell you that," Cynthia smiled, with just a shade of annoyance. "Your—your Neville and I are not engaged. He has never even—ah—mentioned such a thing to me at any time. You see—"

Mrs. Stone stopped her with:

"I see! I see a whole lot more than you think I see. Have done with it! It's as plain as the nose on your face, my dear. The boy has sworn you to secrecy, of course, and your fool little head's so full of 'loyalty and love and all that poppycock that you'd be burned at the stake before you'd admit a thing you thought he wouldn't want you to admit!" propounded Mrs. Stone, with a prodigious chuckle. "You can't fool the old woman, honey! She wasn't built to be fooled!"

"I'm not trying to fool you! We're *not* engaged!" Cynthia cried desperately.

The elder lady considered her with growing approval.

"Well, whether you are or are not—officially—I'm darned glad you're going to marry him," she said. "I've got a dollar

or two to bet that one could comb the town over without finding another girl as sweet as yourself; and that's not sugary bosh, my dear; that's the honest opinion of a woman who has lived with her eyes open!"

"But I—listen!" the caller said feverishly. "I don't even know this Neville! If he were to come in here at this minute with—with two or three other boys, I wouldn't know which was Neville!"

"My dear!" Mrs. Stone said sharply. "I'm not brilliant, perhaps; but credit me at least with a teaspoonful or so of brains! Just pause for an instant and think and see if it doesn't strike even you as amazing that a girl who had never even seen Neville should have boarded a streak of greased lightning and come to call on his mother? I didn't keep any particular track of the time, but I shouldn't have said the messenger boy had had a chance to get to your home—far less for you to answer my daughter's note in person! Doubtless I'm wrong; but it seems to me that the average girl would have phoned Mrs. Ronalds and told her she was barking up the wrong tree?" And she leaned forward suddenly, piercing Cynthia with her penetrating eyes and laughed: "Hey?"

Miss Blair's lips opened—and closed again grimly. There are some things one tells a comparative stranger; there are others which pride forbids one to mention. Cynthia might have been hungry—might, indeed, be perishing from starvation at this very moment—but it was no affair of the unusual person's over there.

The unusual person's laugh had dwindled to a cackle.

"Didn't have a very ready answer for that one, did you, my child?" she asked. "That's one of your greatest beauties, if only you knew it; you're all on the surface and that pretty face of yours is easier to read than any print. However, have it your own way, miss—what's your first name?"

"Ah—Cynthia."

"Cynthia, eh?" smiled Mrs. Stone. "Even your name's solid and fine and respectable. Upon my soul, you're a find! You're a jewel!"

"But I'm not really, you know! I—"

"Have done with all that nonsense, Cyn-

thia!" yawned the elder lady, and waved it all away. "I'll ask no more questions until the lad himself gets home and releases you from—whatever the promise was. We'll just chat comfortably. You've done a wise thing, my dear!"

"In what way?"

"In selecting my grandson for a husband, of course. He has his faults; they all have; but fundamentally he ought to be pretty sound—he's my grandson. Some day he'll get down to brass tacks and have a business of his own. Meanwhile, he's young and irresponsible, but he won't starve."

"Er—no?"

"You knew that, perhaps?"

"Frankly, I never thought anything about it," Cynthia said patiently, and went on searching the recesses of her brain for a phrase or a sentence which should halt the train of this positive being's meditations and turn it about in the direction of the actual facts.

"Frankly, that's another tiny deviation from the truth," Mrs. Stone chuckled quite flatteringly. "Drat it! Don't you know yet that you can't fool *me*, you minx? I might even guess, without hitting so far from the mark, that our Neville has assured you that when he's married *you* he'll be in the way of inheriting my money?"

"Neville never mentioned anything of the kind to me, because—"

Mrs. Stone's head poked forward; her expression was not quite so amiable.

"Look here, honey!" she said. "I set a little store by perfect honesty of speech. I don't ask you to kowtow to me, but I do ask you to believe that I'm not quite senile. However, I suppose if you were absolutely truthful you'd be sheer perfection and just naturally die because you were too good for this world," she muttered, relaxing again. "*He told you* the truth about that, anyway, whether he knew it or not. When I'm gone, you'll have better than three millions between you!"

"Yes?" Cynthia said brilliantly.

"Not so bad, eh? You'll be a millionairess in your own right, unless I change my mind before I die."

"Oh, but I hope—"

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" the elder lady chuckled rather wearily. "And in the meantime, I assure you that you'll not want for anything—How old are you, my child?"

"Twenty-one," said Cynthia.

"Don't belong to this town?"

"I wasn't born here—no. And now—" began Cynthia, for, while it was still rather foggy in her mind she fancied that she had the correct line of attack.

"People living, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes."

"Not the Baltimore Blairs, are they?"

"No, I come from up New York State. And now—"

"Well, wherever you come from, you're a great comfort to me, deary!" yawned Mrs. Stone rather tremendously. "You don't know what devilish bother we've had with that brat of a boy lately—going to marry this one, going to marry that one, and his mother having fifty fits of hysterics over every one. I've been near distracted!"

"Er—yes?" Cynthia said patiently.

"Fact!" said the lady hotly, and thumped just once with her cane. "I was at the point of hiring some qualified female to marry him and have an end of the damned nuisance! I told my daughter that, this very afternoon—And then she decided to ask you to call and she did. I'm a candid woman, Cynthia; I tell you candidly that we supposed you were another scandal in petticoats!"

"Yes?" said Cynthia, with a weak smile."

"And instead—oh, my soul, that boy has no brains at all!" the boy's grandmother cried disgustedly. "If only he'd brought you here in the first place and introduced you, we'd have fallen on your neck."

And now the lady leaned on her cane and again bathed Cynthia in her vast approval—and Cynthia shifted and sighed and prepared to rise.

Whatever this convincing line of attack had been, it had eluded her again; and in any event, there was no need for any sort of attack. This one-sided and slightly fulsome conversation might go on forever, whereas there were several things Cynthia wished to do elsewhere. Mainly, she wished to return to the flat and Nora and then to tele-

phone her Billy at the Morton home—he'd be glad enough to leave his conference for that—and tell him to be sure and be on hand by ten, and that her mysterious errand next door to Morton's was completed and that she was home. Somehow she rather dreaded facing Billy without some such preliminary message to take off the edge. So that, whatever pleasure she might be giving the massive lady in the big chair, she was now about to exercise that freedom of action allegedly bestowed upon all citizens of our great republic—and simply leave.

She arose.

"Now I *must* be going!" she smiled.

"Must—hey?" Mrs. Stone cried, and awoke with a considerable jar from her pleasant reverie.

"Yes, really."

"But I can't let you do that!"

"But you must let me!" Cynthia smiled, sweetly but firmly. "I've enjoyed—ah—this little visit so much."

"Yes, but—hold on!" cried the other, in some agitation. "This engagement of yours—can't that be cancelled?"

"It cannot."

"It 'll have to be!" replied Mrs. Stone remarkably. "I must say that I want you here!"

"Well, I'm sorry, of course," said Cynthia, and some of her patience was departing, "but truly, I'll have to—"

"My dear!"

"Well?"

"Why not do a kindly act? Why not stay here with a lonely old woman until the boy returns?"

"To-night?"

"No, to-morrow or next day," Mrs. Stone smiled seductively. "You don't know what you mean to me, my child! You mean peace in the household—and sometimes I think I'd go to war with the whole world just to get permanent peace in this blamed household. The minute that I see you two fall into each other's arms, the minute I know it's actual fact that you're both as much in love as you seem to be—well, it's going to be the happiest minute of my life, and I don't want to lose sight of you till it gets

here. You've been too long appearing. So now that you're here, stay!"

"But that's impossible!" Cynthia cried, with a rather terrified smile.

"Why is it? We've got fourteen bedrooms in this house and only five of 'em being used!"

"I know—that part of it," Cynthia stammered. "But there's my side of the case, too, you must remember. I've got so many other things to do—to-night and to-morrow and the day after and—and all the time."

"Business?"

"Yes, indeed! Business! So—"

"Well, you haven't got any business that'll net you more than the three millions you'll get with Neville," Mrs. Stone said dryly.

Lips compressed, the visiting Miss Blair drew herself up with some anger. Actually, this absurd situation seemed to have narrowed down to a conflict of wills! The peculiar Mrs. Stone was staring almost hypnotically at her now. Cynthia sensed suddenly, mysteriously, the swift thought that was racing along behind that too characteristic countenance. If she had a quick impulse to shriek in nameless terror and to turn and flee headlong, she mastered this impulse very nicely. When it came to wills, Cynthia had one of her own—and it was just as good a will as any old lady's in the world!

"Possibly not, although I shouldn't consider that sort of thing as business," she smiled faintly. "I'm going now. Good night, Mrs. Stone."

"My dear, I wish you to stay."

"Well, I've tried to explain that that is impossible," said Miss Blair in conclusion. "I'm sorry I haven't succeeded, but still—*good night!*"

And she would have turned toward the door and walked out with quiet young dignity, but Mrs. Stone was rising suddenly, her eyes glinting cold fire, her chin hard as any rock! Obviously this lady had reached the decision at the end of her meditation.

"One moment!" she rapped out. "I've asked you to stay. Now I say you *shall* stay! How about *that?*"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



The Duke of Disdain

By FRANK BLIGHTON

Author of "Ballast," "A Hatful of Trouble," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

O'BRIEN INVESTIGATES.

"EX-CELLENCY!" stammered the little man in front of the desk.

Sergeant Timothy O'Brien peered through his spectacles from his perch in Precinct Station House No. 3 at the undersized visitor.

The chap held his hat in his hand and his fingers crumpled its soft brim. He was swarthy and unkempt. His clothes were greasy. His nondescript features betrayed his foreign blood.

"Well, what do you want?" gruffly demanded O'Brien.

The swarthy chap gulped. He was plainly timorous amid the unwonted surroundings of the station house.

Mechanically O'Brien's gaze flitted to the clock on the opposite wall above the visitor. The sergeant was a methodical

soul. It was already ten-thirty, he would be "off" at twelve and he had plenty to do with the big sheet before him. The set of his stodgy shoulders with its close-fitting blouse, the poise of his huge hands, one of which gripped a dripping pen, were not conducive to confidences.

Which was as it should be, for the pushcart men were such a nuisance. Here was another of the pests, with the oft-told tale of being driven out of the residential park district in which Precinct No. 3 was situated. O'Brien knew the type. They were all alike. If this chap had a complaint to voice in jargon like most of them, he much preferred that Acting Captain Overton should hear it, since he would pass on it, anyway. Overton was just now in the rear of the station house. He would be back presently.

So, O'Brien "stalled."

B-b-r-r! went the buzzer on the switch-

board at his elbow. Glad of any excuse to avoid needless interruption, the sergeant swerved in the chair, tossed up the lever below the fluttering white disk, clamped the dangling receiver to his ear, and replied:

"Callahan. O. K. Good-by."

Again his eyes sought the clock and his poised pen with the precision of long habit sought the column opposite Callahan's name, who was on "post five." In this space he wrote: "10.32 P.M."

He took his time about it, too. Drat the push-cart peddlers, anyhow! Why didn't they stay on their own side of the town, instead of invading Precinct No. 3, in the exclusive residential section of Downington? Nobody here wanted their celluloid collar buttons or their garlic.

"Ex-excellency!" again piped the prototype of the polyglot tribe of push-cart fiends, who would not stay with their "own kind" on the south side of Downington, among the steel mills and other factories.

"Go home, me good man," purred O'Brien, with spurious fatherliness. "Push your cart until it's wheels drop off, if ye want to, beyant the trolley thracks of Main Street, but kape off the asphalt avenues on *this* side. 'Tis thrue there is no city awrdinance as yet phrotecting this side of town ag'in the likes of ye; but to save your time and mine, I'll tell ye here and now that afther the tenth of nixt month there'll be wan, because—"

The balance of his statement went unnarrated.

"There is trouble at the house of Mr. Fitch," cut in the supposed "pushcarter" as Acting Captain Overton's footsteps sounded near the door leading from the squad-room.

O'Brien rallied. "Well, why didn't ye say so in the first place?" he truculently bellowed. "Throuble, is ut? What kind?"

"I was told to come and ask for an officer," civilly returned the swarthy one. His words were clipped as he added: "I am Simon Mordaunt, Mr. Fitch's chauffeur?"

"Did Mr. Fitch send ye?"

"No, sir. Mrs. Meredith, his aunt."

"Why didn't she telephone?"

"The telephone seems not to be in order."

Acting Captain Overton who had come in, stepped forward. "What did she say the trouble was?"

"She did not say, sir."

Overton glanced at the clock. "Callahan's beat. Tell him to go over when he rings in—he's due now," said he to O'Brien.

"He just rang, lieutenant, a moment ago."

"Was some one prowling around the grounds?" asked Overton.

"I saw no one as I came down the hill, sir."

"You better go up, Tim, and investigate," said Overton. "We only have one man on reserve. The others I've just sent to No One, for special detail, in the wagon."

O'Brien hurried out with the chauffeur. It was a misty night hinting of rain.

The first sharp ascent and the pace the chauffeur set were enough to incline O'Brien to refrain from questions until they reached the rippling curves of "The Circle," Downington's choicest residential park.

The mansion beyond seemed a monstrous blot against the mist as they trudged up its drive. O'Brien knew the place well. Years before he had covered this same beat, as a patrolman.

The library windows now glowed with a bright sheen the mist made mysterious if not sinister, as they clumped up the side entrance and went in, the chauffeur leading.

Within ten feet from the entrance stood a sofa. It had a brocade surface, curved back and curved arms. On this huddled the figure of an elderly woman, whose face, haggard with horror, was as gray as her hair. Bending over her was another and very young woman, whose slender figure was clad in a dainty garment and knitted silken slippers.

She caught her robe close to her neck with one hand as Mordaunt and O'Brien came in, holding in the other a glass for the woman on the sofa.

"What's wrong, miss?" asked the sergeant.

Despite her dishabille there was perfect poise in her manner as she raised her eyes to O'Brien's.

She was a golden girl, curved from the

beams of a spring sun, tinted with the first blush of a moss-rose, while her level gaze held the blue of violet.

"I do not know. I heard Mrs. Meredith moaning and I just this instant ran down from my room and got this glass of water. I think she has fainted."

O'Brien turned to Mordaunt. "Who else is here, among servants?"

"I think the housekeeper and maid have gone to the movies. Mr. Fitch was here at dinner, for I drove him up from town in his limousine."

The woman on the couch moaned and opened her eyes. Then she took a sip from the glass held to her lips and sat more erect. As she caught sight of O'Brien's uniform and shield, she gestured and whispered: "In the library."

Then she sank back again, utterly overcome.

"Stay here with the ladies until I get back," said O'Brien to Mordaunt.

"Very well, sir."

O'Brien gave a hitch to his blouse that brought his service pistol handy, stepped along the hall a few feet to where it ran into a larger one at right angles, turned to the right and walked noiselessly to the library entrance.

He paused before the heavy portières masking it. They hung from a mahogany rod, with gleaming rings and caps at the ends, and they seemed to cling edge to edge as if seeking to mask what was behind them.

O'Brien paused and sniffed.

The acrid odor of powder smoke was slightly discernible, even before he cautiously parted the curtains and peered within, where it was very much stronger.

At the left Claude Cutler Fitch was sitting in a chair, attired in semi-formal evening clothes, immaculate save for a slight bulge to his shirt-front. His eyes met the officer's with a languid, impersonal look. Mr. Fitch did not speak.

But he was alive, apparently unharmed, and O'Brien's gaze roved to the space beyond. At the right of his point of view from the curtains was a massive mahogany library table. On the rug beyond it protruded a pair of legs. One of them was

projected straight on the floor covering, the other bent upward, and as the policeman's eye caught it, it twitched nervously, then sagged down beside its fellow and moved no more.

The two legs were all he could see from where he was.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGE LOOK.

O'BRIEN'S next glance again took in Mr. Fitch, whose expression puzzled him no less than his eccentric behavior under such circumstances. At first he thought that the master of the house, as well as the owner of the legs, had been injured.

But he appeared much the same as usual, and yet strangely different. He was a young man, anywhere between twenty-four and twenty-eight, smooth-shaven, with slightly waving brown hair and eyes and an aquiline nose. Standing erect Mr. Fitch was just under six feet and possessed a compact and muscular body.

O'Brien had seen him often from boyhood. He had seen him fall heir to the famous Fitch Steel mills on the south side, where the polyglot population bred pests like push-cart men.

But never before had he seen him quite as now. Ordinarily, Mr. Fitch was courteous, and his rather ingenuous face was slightly tempered by a hint of proud reserve.

To-night the hint of proud reserve stepped completely out of the background and deepened into an inflexible disdain.

It was the most curious and baffling expression O'Brien had ever met up with in twenty-odd years' police duty in Downing-ton.

Mr. Fitch seemed not only imperturbable, but without speech.

O'Brien looked elsewhere. A sinister glimmer shot up from the rug in the space midway between Mr. Fitch in his chair and the two legs protruding from beyond the heavy library table.

It seemed to heliograph: "Here I am!"

O'Brien looked down at it. The light

overhead was reflected from a silver-mounted pistol with an ivory handle. He did not pick it up for a police reason. The finger-print experts would deal with it gingerly, until they knew who had last handled it.

"How did this happen?" asked O'Brien.

Mr. Fitch's look of disdain relaxed only long enough for him to reply, as he inclined his head toward the body on the rug:

"Ask him—he knows."

"What do you mean?"

"I heard a report. I saw something fall. I saw him sag down. That's all I know."

"Who is he?"

"Look at him yourself. What else did you come in for?"

O'Brien was rather mystified by the diabolic irony in the tone, until he stepped around the corner of the table. From the tail of his eye he warily watched Claude Cutler Fitch. He might be heir to much money, or flat broke—it was all one to O'Brien, until this matter was explained in court, unless the man on the floor was a "yegg."

However, he reflected that Mr. Fitch didn't seem to regard the situation as seriously as one would expect; at least he had been privileged to flee the house before O'Brien arrived. There might be a perfectly rational explanation. And still, with it all, there was something mighty odd—in Mr. Fitch's facial expression, notwithstanding the last statement he had made, implying the other had destroyed himself.

If the man on the floor was not quite dead, as yet, O'Brien's inspection disclosed that he would be, long before medical or surgical aid could arrive.

O'Brien looked down into the face of the prone man. His eyes were already glazing and the blood which had streamed from his mouth was clotting on his pallid lips. His imperial and mustache were enough to identify him to almost any one in Downington.

O'Brien, in his first shock, would have instinctively saluted or at least removed his cap if he had not done so on entering the house; for he was looking down on what had been, earlier that evening, the mayor

of Downington, in private life Attorney Ordway Marshall.

O'Brien's first thought, when he could think at all, bore no relation to time or place. It concerned the push-cart ordinance which he had sponsored before the police commission and the mayor, and which, with his statistics of complaints, he had rescued.

Mr. Fitch still sat where he had been when O'Brien had entered. He still refrained from speaking. And the incredible expression of disdain, if anything, was more rampant than ever.

Mechanically O'Brien reached out his hand for the extension telephone on the corner of the library table, immediately above the projecting legs of the dead man. His movement elicited as little response from Claude Cutler Fitch as jiggling the receiver evoked from "central."

Then the officer remembered the chauffeur's statement: "The phone seems not to be in order," replaced it and glanced at his watch. It was exactly 11:10 P.M.

Without either a word or a look toward Mr. Fitch, O'Brien stepped out of the library back down the hall and toward the side entrance, where he had left the chauffeur and the two ladies.

The chauffeur was still there.

"Where are the ladies?"

Mordaunt thumbed toward the stairway.

"You stay here," said O'Brien to the chauffeur. "I'm going out a minute." He slid through the side door, ran down the steps and skirted the front of the house.

Being a devotee of routine, O'Brien knew that Callahan, if "on the job," should now be on his way past this very house to "pull the box" some squares below, at 11:15, the scheduled "ring in." He whipped out his whistle and blew three soft blasts, the signal of the "inspection sergeant" who had "lost his patrolman." Near-by a night stick clattered in response, and Callahan, in mackintosh, loomed up.

"Hello, Sarge!"

"Come wid me," said O'Brien gruffly. "Hist me up in front of that windy!"

Callahan complied.

O'Brien saw that Mr. Fitch had not changed his position or his expression.

"Now, we'll go inside," he said.

"I'm very sorry, sor," began the sergeant, entering the room where Mr. Fitch sat, "but I'll have to ask you to step down to the station wid me to have a little talk wid Acting Captain Overton."

Mr. Fitch rose and followed O'Brien out into the hall. On the right as they emerged hung a dark fedora hat with a silk faced under-brim and a light overcoat of some dark material with silken lapels. These he put on, without comment, save to nod civilly, to Callahan.

O'Brien drew Callahan aside.

"Let no one already here leave the house or go into the library. And don't go in there yourself. Mayor Marshall is dead on the floor from a gunshot wound."

"May the saints save us!" gasped Callahan.

"Mr. Mordaunt, you will come with Mr. Fitch and me," said O'Brien, leading the way toward the side entrance. The chauffeur followed, after one furtive glance at his master. Outside, he walked ahead, as they swung down the hill in a silence as eerie as the mist.

Ordinarily, O'Brien would have asked a prisoner in such circumstances innumerable questions. But Mr. Fitch was not an ordinary prisoner. He was among the wealthiest residents of Downington; he still wore the look of lofty contempt which had never left his face except when he had answered O'Brien's questions, and there might be a perfectly satisfactory explanation to all of this.

Besides, O'Brien was "off" at midnight and it was plainly up to his superiors to ascertain the how, when and why of Mayor Marshall's death.

CHAPTER III.

THE INQUEST.

PUBLIC interest in capital crime is invariably proportionate to the prominence of the individuals involved.

This axiom was restated a bit more floridly within thirty-six hours of the time that Simon Mordaunt had entered the station house—by Mr. James Montgomery

Hardy of the Downington *Evening Express*. Mr. Hardy always spoke floridly, especially when he addressed his friend, Hank Thomas of the *Morning Times*.

"I should say so," agreed Hank.

Hardy was a dapper little chap with a smug face and an air of always holding a mirror up to any one in Downington whom he thought "worth while." He also had what he called a "penchant" for "society stuff," which he sometimes termed his "métier" in newspaper work, and checked suits. He had been in Downington five years, knew all the "buds" by their first names as well as by sign, and enough matrons to learn the names of the other buds as they "came out."

He smiled in a superior way as Hank and himself stalked into the city court room to report the formal inquest. Hank was his antithesis, being a lantern-jawed Yankee from Maine, loose-jointed as a rickety clothes-horse, and with a "penchant" for Pittsburgh stogies, which habit he never called by any French name. He also had a keen nose for news and a habit of writing it without metaphorical reference, although he sometimes injected into his copy a little of his always smoldering humor.

"Where were you on the night of nights?" asked Hank.

"On Claude Cutler Fitch's front doorstep, almost under the library window the night before the mayor's demise. You should have been there to see the young lady who answered my ring, after Mrs. Meredith had called up the office. Miss Dorothy Dale is somehow mixed up in this affair."

Hank tossed a city newspaper toward him. "Is she as alluring as her photograph or as her alliterative name?"

Mr. James Montgomery Hardy looked and lost a lot of his savoir faire. Hank Thomas was a newcomer in Downington, and as yet had hardly time to build up a "private morgue." Callahan, Hardy knew, would not permit any one to roam the house for he had gone up there himself on hearing Mr. Fitch was in the station house at Precinct No. 3 on "an open charge." Until of late, Mr. James Montgomery had been privileged to pursue news at intervals

of spelling his own full name, if he chose. Now, this ungainly rival had scored a "beat," for Mr. Hardy had not acquired a photograph of Miss Dale.

"How did you manage to get that?" he demanded.

Hank grinned, replacing his dry stogie in his pocket as the door opened and Coroner Cleves and other officials swarmed in.

Among them were Assistant District Attorney Meyers, whom Hardy called "a bloodhound in homicide cases"; Acting Captain Overton, with Mr. Fitch and the latter's attorney, Noble Howard; followed by the coroner's jury, all of whom had just come from the city morgue.

The jurors wriggled into their seats as if they, instead of Mr. Fitch, were guilty. Mr. Fitch, although paler than usual and more careworn, did not wear the traditional hang-dog look nearly as much as they. His air of habitual reserve deepened into more pronounced hauteur, as the reporters from the city newspapers swarmed into the space where Hardy and Thomas had prudently ensconced themselves in advance.

Behind this barrier rail the court room was packed with morbid and curious folk of both sexes. Down the center aisle, through them all, came Sergeant Timothy O'Brien, wearing civilian garments, but with his shield pinned on, as required by law, when officially in court.

His name was the first called as a witness.

Under the skillful questioning of Mr. Meyers, O'Brien sketched his movements from Mordaunt's arrival to the conversation in the library with Mr. Fitch.

"What did you first say to Mr. Fitch?"

"I said: 'How did this happen?'"

"What reply did he make?"

"Mr. Fitch nodded his head toward the body on the r-rug and said: 'Ask him—he knows.'"

"Did he say anything more?"

"Not until I asked him another question."

"What was your next question?"

"I said to Mr. Fitch: 'What do you mean?'"

"Why did you say that, instead of asking the man on the floor a question?"

"Because the man on the flure couldn't answer any question. He was dying if not dead by then."

"How do you know?"

O'Brien related the episode of the twitching leg.

"You saw that before you came into the room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, after you said: 'What do you mean?' to Mr. Fitch, did he make any reply?"

"Yes, sir."

"You may state what he said if you can recall it, substantially."

"I can recall it exactly. Mr. Fitch said: 'I heard a report. I saw something fall. I saw him sag down. That's all I know.'"

"What next occurred?"

"I said: 'Who is he?'"

"Did Mr. Fitch reply? If so, tell us what he said."

"Mr. Fitch said: 'Look at him yourself. What else did you come in for?'"

Mr. Myers paused to let the import of the conversation sink in with the jury, whose members sat as erect as so many fox-terriers scenting an expected bone.

Then he had O'Brien identify the silver-mounted, ivory handled pistol, and where he had seen it on the floor, by means of a diagram which Myers now pinned on the wall. The diagram was drawn to scale and showed the floor of the Fitch residence on which the library was situated, in detail.

O'Brien indicated the spot, adding that the pistol lay "about midway between the feet of the body on the floor and where Mr. Fitch sat in the chair, over between the two front windows."

"The library table stood where?"

"A little to the right, as you look into the room through the curtains, and about six or seven feet from where they hang." Again he illustrated the spot on the diagram, following with the location of the table, beyond which projected the feet of the prone man, and showing how his head, behind the library table, was not plainly visible from where he had first stood.

"Now, did Mr. Fitch and you hold any other conversation?"

"No, sir."

"Did he offer any explanation, without questions or replies from you, as to what had occurred and how it had occurred?"

"Only what I have said."

"What else, if anything, did you observe about the demeanor or appearance of Mr. Fitch, up to this time, while you were in the library with him?"

"Very little, except a wrinkle on his shirt front and the odd look on his face."

"What do you mean by 'odd look'?"

Noble Howard rose. "That evidence is immaterial, unless the odd look had some external cause—such as might result, for instance, from a struggle."

"If the witness is allowed to state what he saw, it may be most material," said Myers. "What could be more material than the way Mr. Fitch conducted himself? Suppose he was weeping, violently—what then?"

"The witness may answer," ruled Coroner Cleves.

"Well," said O'Brien, "he looked in the face much the same as he always looked iver since I knowed him—only much more so."

"What do you mean by that?"

"He looked as proud as a juke, and besides, he had a 'don't-give-a-hoot' look on top of that, like a bat-out-o'-hell—excuse my language—I'm doin' my best."

Coroner Cleves rapped sharply at the slight titter and frowned. Hank Thomas made a note: "Ducal disdain." Mentally to himself he added: "It doesn't mean much or it may mean anything and everything."

The balance of O'Brien's testimony was detail of Mr. Fitch's trip to the station house and his turning over the prisoner and chauffeur to Acting Captain Overton.

Noble Howard then took the police officer in hand.

"Did you ever see a 'juke'?" he asked.

"Only pitchers of 'em."

"Ever see a 'bat-out-of-hell'?"

"Only pitchers of 'em in a book."

"What book?"

"A book with pitchers of hell and nothing much else in it, by a man by the name of Dan. I don't remember his last name. I think he was Polish."

"Are you, by any possibility, referring to a book called 'Dante's Inferno'?"

"I'll have to hand it to you, Mister Howard. I mind it now, that's the identical name."

"How long ago since you saw those pictures?"

"Oh, I was a boy—couldn't hardly read yet."

"But the impression the pictures you saw of these bats, from the locality you mentioned, was so like Mr. Fitch's facial expression, that you immediately compared his appearance to this extremely remote mental image?"

"Mostly as to the turrible proud look he wore," explained O'Brien, "not so much because the surroundin's reminded me of the place the book mentioned."

"That's all," snapped Howard.

Hank Thomas confided to James Montgomery Hardy, *sotto voce*: "I'll say, O'Brien is a good cop. Well, who is the next actor on the 'cold meat' bill, as Mr. Shakespeare might phrase it, if he were here and wearing your checked suit?"

Mr. Hardy shuddered. "I think you are very uncouth if not horrid," he opined.

"Thought transference, Jimmie. Noble Howard thinks the same thing of Sergeant O'Brien. O'Brien put an awful wrinkle in his client's shroud with that 'turrible proud look' remark. The jury feel just the same as if Mr. Fitch got right up here and shouted: 'I did it. I'm glad I did it.'"

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLOODHOUND.

SIMON MORDAUNT was next sworn. He was Mr. Fitch's chauffeur. The night of the mayor's demise he had been working in the garage, "fixing the timing-gears on the limousine, as it was missing." He didn't know what time it was when he went into the servants' quarters on the ground floor to get some lunch, being rather hungry. He was drinking a glass of lemonade when Mrs. Meredith came in, and asked him to go to the police station and get an officer. He suggested telephoning, but the wire wasn't working.

"Did you hear the shot fired, when you were downstairs?"

"Ex-excellency, I may have dimly heard a sound. But, what goes on upstairs is not in my duties."

"Why do you use the word 'excellency'?"

"My father taught me to be respectful to those in authority."

"What nationality are you?"

"American born, of Portugee parents."

He stated that his father had always been a gardener. There was no cross-examination.

Acting Captain Overton was called. He told of the arrival of O'Brien with Mr. Fitch and the chauffeur, of questioning the chauffeur, and of telling him to go home but be on hand when wanted. Meanwhile, Mr. Fitch was suddenly taken very ill before a word was said to him. He was in a cell downstairs. Overton told of telephoning for Dr. Shumway, surgeon to the police department, and that was practically all his evidence.

Dr. Shumway followed. He described Mr. Fitch, on his arrival, as "suffering from violent nausea, spasmodic in character, with pulse and heart beat abnormally low, eyes very much contracted, and features covered with a profuse cold sweat."

Myers here showed a real cloven hoof.

"The symptoms were typical of toxic poisoning?"

"I object." Howard leaped up, his face black with wrath. "I move to strike that question from the record. It is infamous. This is an effort, through inference and innuendo, to create the impression without legal evidence, that after shooting the mayor, Mr. Fitch took poison before the police arrived. Every effort of this kind is contrary to law and equity. I see now why Mr. Myers insisted upon O'Brien's testimony, that Mr. Fitch's expression was 'like a bat-out-of-hell.' I won't permit such perversion of law!"

There was a wordy wrangle, concluding by Howard's insistence that if any tangible evidence existed in support of the poisoning theory the police physician was present, the man in custody, and only an analysis could determine if it were founded on fact or conjecture.

He won his first and only point, then and there.

Dr. Shumway next told of conducting the autopsy. "The bullet entered the left breast of the deceased at a slight angle with reference to the horizontal axis of the body, just above the heart, penetrating the lung, traversing it, entering the muscular tissue surrounding the spine, and flattened out against the vertebræ there. Death ensued from traumatic shock and internal and external hemorrhage."

He next identified the lethal bullet and testified to extracting and weighing it. Then to weighing one of the bullets he had removed from one of the five unexploded cartridges found in the pistol. The weights were almost identical, so nearly so that every one knew Mayor Marshall had been shot to death by a bullet of thirty-two caliber.

He was not cross-examined. Inspector Long of police headquarters was next. He identified finger-print photographs of Mr. Fitch and enlargements of them; he testified he picked up the thirty-two caliber pistol from the rug; he then showed photographs of the metallic surface of it, with corresponding "definitions," uncanny in their symmetry, even to laymen, with Mr. Fitch's finger-prints. One was from the trigger itself. The only possible inference was that Claude Cutler Fitch had personally fired that pistol the last time it was discharged.

Like a relentless bloodhound of avenging justice, Mr. Myers kept linking up evidence. He next called: "Mrs. Cora Meredith," and a court officer went to the door of an adjoining room, opened it, and escorted an aged and infirm woman with gray hair to the stand, after carefully closing it.

She trembled when she was sworn and at first her voice cracked constantly, with nervousness or grief. But Myers was very, very considerate of her, and by degrees she grew more confident. His tact elicited whispers of praise among the audience. But Claude Cutler Fitch only sneered the more the net closed around him.

Mrs. Meredith was Mr. Fitch's aunt, she said; she told of admitting Ordway Marshall to the Fitch home and of escorting him

to the library, "rather late." She could not fix the time, exactly, but "judged it to be around ten o'clock." She did not know the man, personally or by virtue of his public office; merely that her nephew had told her that "he expected a gentleman to call, and to call him down from his den when he came."

This she had done. Mr. Fitch was smoking when he came down, she recalled seeing him throw away the cigar, for he only smoked up in his den, and not in other parts of the house.

"You saw Mr. Fitch go into the library?"

"Yes."

"This caller was already there?"

"Yes."

"Where did you go from there?"

Mrs. Meredith explained that she went toward the rear of the house and down to the servants' quarters on the lower floor, since the housekeeper and maid had "an evening out; to see if everything was all right." When she came up, she remembered that Mr. Fitch, at dinner, had said he wanted to take the seven o'clock train the following morning to the city; hence she went back downstairs to see that the "chops for breakfast and the cream for the cereal were in the ice chest"; that she then came upstairs again, paused to be sure the dining room table was already set; and when that was done, she went from the dining room, along the main hall upstairs.

"Your nephew was still in the library with this caller, all of this time?"

"So far as I know."

Myers paused. Then he asked: "When you went upstairs, as you— Never mind that. Instead: Did you ever see this pistol, before?"

Mrs. Meredith, through a mist of tears, identified it as "my nephew, Claude's." She had often seen it "on his bureau or in the top drawer, where he kept it for burglars." She did not know when she had last seen it; but she was rather sure that if it had been taken to the library, she would have seen it there, and quite sure that it was not there.

"Now," said Myers, "when you went up and down stairs from the dining room to

the servants' quarters, as you have testified, did you see any one else in that part of the house?"

"No. There was no one."

"Any one between that part of the house and the library?"

"Not that I saw."

"If there had been, would you have seen them?"

"If they had been there when I came up, I probably would."

"Who else was in the house, beside your nephew and his caller in the library, if any one?"

"Only a guest of mine, Miss Dorothy Dale."

"Where was Miss Dale?"

"When I went up from the library floor to the sleeping floor, I went back to her room to chat with her a minute. Miss Dale was then in her room, reclining in a Morris chair, reading a book."

She told of the guest room being situated about halfway between the front and rear of the mansion; of going back to her room, and of closing the door. Afterward, she heard a "loud" sound from the library.

Again the aged lady trembled. She seemed on the verge of a collapse. Myers, by a quick switch in the trend of her testimony, gave her new heart.

"Was there a rear stairway as well as the one you used, in the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"How far from Miss Dale's room?"

"About thirty feet."

"Leading from the corridor by which you entered her room?"

"No, it is a servants' stairway. To get to it from Miss Dale's room, you have to go down the sleeping floor hall, through at least two rooms, out into another corridor and then you come on the rear stairway."

"Was it humanly possible in your opinion for Miss Dale to have left her room immediately after you left it, and, unseen by you, gone through the passages you have described, down the rear stairway, through and into the hall below, along it toward the front of the house and reached the library in the elapsed time before you returned to your room and heard this—report—did you say?"

"It was not, in my opinion."

Here Myers sprang his *coup*.

Instead of next taking Mrs. Meredith through the agonizing moments that had ensued after she heard the report, including her fainting fit, he adroitly switched clear back to where she had first come up the front stairs.

"As you came through the long hall on the library floor, to reach the stairs to go to your own or Miss Dale's room for this chat, did you hear voices in the library?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear any of the conversation?"

"Unintentionally."

"Just what did you hear and how did you come to hear it?"

"I was just putting my foot on the first step—"

Her voice trailed off into a spectral whisper. Her face grew livid. Myers hastily pressed a glass of water to her lips.

Then she seemed to find calmness in sheer despair.

"You were standing with one foot on the bottom stair," said Myers, "and you heard conversation in the library. Could you distinguish the words?"

"I heard a voice which was not my nephew's utter two words."

"What were they?"

"'Dorothy Dale.' I paused, involuntarily in my surprise—"

"Why were you surprised that the name of your guest should be mentioned by your nephew's caller?"

"Because while I did not know the man, yet he had nevertheless mentioned the name of my guest. So, I paused, involuntarily—"

"Very naturally, Mrs. Meredith. Now, did you hear anything more than those two words?"

"Yes. I next heard my nephew's voice. He said: 'What do you mean?'"

"Did the caller's voice reply?"

"Yes, he said: 'You know what I mean!'"

"Did your nephew speak again?"

"Yes. He said: 'You hound! Do you mean to insinuate—that I could entertain—any dishonorable motives—toward that divine girl?'"

Myers permitted her to pause.

"Did you hear anything more?"

"I didn't want to hear anything more. I hurried upstairs."

"And *that*," purred the prosecutor, "was *why* you went to Miss Dale's room, to have a chat with her, before going to bed, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"Now, what did you say to Miss Dale in that chat and what did Miss Dale say to you?"

"Objected to as incompetent and immaterial," said Howard. "Any conversation, with others than Mr. Fitch, especially without Mr. Fitch's knowledge, is not competent evidence."

"It may throw light on what led up to the death of a man in his presence," said Myers. "This is not a trial of Mr. Fitch—it is a judicial inquest to establish what caused the death of Ordway Marshall."

Coroner Cleves permitted Mrs. Meredith to answer.

"I did not tell Miss Dale what I had overheard. I mentioned the man in the library with Claude, and described him. I said he was a stranger to me and asked her if she knew who it was."

"Miss Dale replied?"

"Yes, she looked up from her book and said: 'Why, from the sort of a beard he wears, I think it is Mr. Ordway Marshall. He was a friend of my father's and sometimes acted as an attorney for him, before father died, I think.'"

"Anything more?"

"No. I said it looked like rain outside, and bade her good-night and went back to my room."

"And, almost as soon as you entered it, you heard this report of a shot from the region of the library?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you discussed this matter with Miss Dale since the shooting?"

"No, sir. I have been too distraught."

The witness was excused.

James Montgomery Hardy turned triumphantly to Hank Thomas and whispered: "Bloodhound Myers followed the scent closely. I told you he was worthwhile in homicide cases. I know his record."

Myers, meanwhile, was poking in a portfolio of papers, until Mrs. Meredith reached the door of the side room. Then he desisted.

"Call Miss Dorothy Dale!"

CHAPTER V.

A PLAIN CASE.

"YOU have met Mr. Fitch since your earlier girlhood quite often?" blandly queried Myers, when Dorothy took the stand.

"Occasionally, rather than often."

"If merely occasionally and not often, can you recall where?"

"Always, except when visiting Mrs. Meredith, at some affair."

"Did Mr. Fitch ever call upon you when you were not at his home?"

"Never."

"Did he ever meet you alone at any pre-arranged place?"

"Never alone. Once, by inadvertence, we happened to be in the same box at a theatrical performance. That is the sole exception."

"Inadvertence?"

"I did not know he expected to attend."

"But he may have known you expected to attend."

"He professed surprise," said Miss Dale, "and left before the end of the performance, while I remained."

"He also expressed his pleasure at meeting you, although unexpectedly?"

"In the usual conventional terms."

"Yet, to be entirely candid, Miss Dale, Mr. Fitch and yourself have always been on terms of some small intimacy?" gently insinuated the prosecutor.

If the dual import of the word selected occurred to Miss Dale it caused no delay in her prompt reply: "We have always been good friends."

"Ever discuss with Mr. Fitch any such topic as Mrs. Meredith has testified was the topic of part of the conversation between the late Ordway Marshall and Mr. Fitch, in the latter's library, just prior to Mr. Marshall's death?"

Noble Howard leaped to his feet, shout-

ing: "Again I deliberately denounce such infamy, masquerading in the guise of a legal procedure, invoked in justice to the dead."

Myers whirled on him. "You won't get another chance in this judicial inquiry nor in any other to accuse me of prejudicing Mr. Fitch's welfare by 'inference and innuendo.' Remember I'm probing for facts."

Coroner Cleves ruled the witness could state whether or not she had discussed "any topic" with Mr. Fitch, "such as Mrs. Meredith overheard the deceased discussing with Mr. Fitch."

"But I do not know what they were talking about," said Miss Dale, "because I did not hear Mrs. Meredith's testimony."

Myers directed the stenographer to read that portion of Mrs. Meredith's testimony. Attorney Howard again interposed, offering, in behalf of Mr. Fitch, "to waive any further examination of witnesses, and abide the verdict of the jury and that of the coroner on facts already of record."

Myers wouldn't permit this. He contended that it was vital to the commonwealth's case that Miss Dale give her testimony, in order that it could be used later, in the event she, too, "passed from the jurisdiction of the higher court through unexpected death or for any other reason," and he won the point.

Miss Dale was obviously more perplexed than perturbed at the words "dishonorable motives" and their sinister significance regarding herself.

"I have no idea what they were talking about," said she, quietly, "and certainly Mr. Fitch never discussed any unpleasing things with me at any time."

"He was always gallant in his attitude toward you?" purred Myers.

"Always amiable."

"Did you know Mr. Marshall?"

"Almost as long as Mr. Fitch."

"Did you know he was coming to the house that night to see Mr. Fitch?"

"No."

"Had you seen Mr. Marshall recently?"

"As recently as last week, while shopping in Mr. Fitch's limousine with Mrs. Meredith. I left her in the car, and took Mordaunt, the chauffeur, with me to bring some bundles from a store. Near the cen-

ter aisle I met Mr. Marshall. He greeted me and I greeted him."

"Anything else?"

"He said: 'Dorothy, I'm glad to see you. I was thinking about writing you to call at my office next week. I want to talk over a certain matter with you.'"

"What did you say?"

"I said I would come at any time he sent for me. He said he would write or phone to me, but did neither."

Myers again dove into his portfolio and if he feigned disappointment at not finding what he was after, he dissembled extremely well, so Hank Thomas thought. Hank could not make up his mind if this reiterated behavior of the prosecutor was genuine or a bit of by-play to mask his real tactics in the next questions.

Miss Dale next said she could not recall hearing the shot; she was absorbed in her book; but, afterward, when she heard Mrs. Meredith moaning, she went down to her. She explained that she heard the latter, because, in turn, she had left her room and gone to Mrs. Meredith's, found the door open and heard the moans below from the library hall.

"What made you go to her room, after she bade you good-night?"

"When I finished reading, I remembered Mrs. Meredith said it looked as if it would rain the next day. I opened my window and saw the mist. Then, as I had lost or mislaid my umbrella, the same day I met Mr. Marshall while shopping with her, and as I had asked her to make inquiry among the servants and of the chauffeur, more particularly, I went to her to learn if the umbrella had been found."

"What kind of an umbrella?" asked Myers.

"It had a carved ebony handle, with a silver band engraved with my initials and those of the donor, and a figured silk top."

Just here Hank Thomas experienced his first real thrill of the proceeding, aside from the appreciation of the beauty of this girl, which impressed and haunted him.

"Who gave you that umbrella?"

"Mr. Fitch, on my last birthday."

"The day you were nineteen?"

"Yes, sir."

"So, you attached a sentimental value to it as well as a pecuniary one?"

"I disliked to lose it through my own oversight. I'm sure I took it with me that morning when I went shopping, as I have said."

"How were you attired when you left your room?"

"The same as when Officer O'Brien arrived."

"Do you usually roam through the house in negligee?"

"Only, as a rule, in the part reserved for Mrs. Meredith and myself. There were no other guests."

"But, Mr. Fitch was in the library—you'd been told that," sneered Myers. "And he didn't sleep there, did he?"

Miss Dale's color mounted at the coarse imputation. But her gaze was level and her reply unmoved.

"He occupied the second sleeping floor with a suite, including his den. I was not in view, had he come up the stairs, in going to Mrs. Meredith's room."

"But," persisted the alleged bloodhound, "you had been told he was in the library when Mrs. Meredith came to your room. That was some time previous, wasn't it?"

"That is my impression."

"The evidence shows," went on Myers, "that Mrs. Meredith almost at once after leaving your room and reaching and entering her own, barely thirty feet from yours, heard a shot; and then she must have gone down to the library floor; and thence to the servants' floor below that, where Mordaunt who had just come in from working in the garage was getting himself some lunch; and then she wanted a policeman summoned and he suggested telephoning; and the wire was out of order and so Mrs. Meredith sent him in person to the police station; and after all of that she came back to the library floor, where you heard her moaning; but, Officer O'Brien also testified that you told him that you had 'that instant' come down, and had just got the glass of water. Now, where were you in the interim?"

"In my room, reading."

"All that period of time—that long time?"

"It did not seem long, to me, as I was reading."

"You did not see Mr. Fitch after you went to the room of his aunt to ask if your silk umbrella had been found by any of the servants?"

"Certainly not. I did not see him from the time he went upstairs to have a smoke in his den, after dinner, until I saw him again here to-day."

Miss Dale's unsophistication had proven at last a little vulnerable to the undeniable 'inference and innuendo' until now rampant in all minds but her own who followed the crafty prosecutor. And while she was grieved at it, anger at the salacious imputation rode high over the sense of lesser personal injury. She was still perfectly poised, but her burning eyes betrayed the intensity of her feeling and Myers dropped his gaze to again fumble in his portfolio. Then, abruptly, he excused her.

"Have you any more witnesses, Mr. Myers?" asked Coroner Cleves.

"I intended to call Miss Rebecca Lowenthal, Mayor Marshall's stenographer, but owing to my inability to locate a certain paper for her to identify, I will dispense with her testimony. I think, your honor, that I have made out a *prima facie* case of murder against Mr. Fitch."

The jury and coroner thought likewise. Mr. Fitch was forthwith committed to the county jail.

CHAPTER VI.

JAILMATES.

THE jail to which Claude Cutler Fitch was taken had an ancestry fully as venerable as his own. It was located on the far side of town and on an eminence above the intervening vale, where the Fitch Steel Mills were situated.

Originally this jail had been set on a small knoll and constructed as a blockhouse for pioneers in that troubled Indian country. It was built four-square, with thick walls of limestone set in mortar. On the lower floor were only two windows and one door to each of two sides. The upper story was pierced with plenty of openings.

In later years a wing had been built on one side, but, owing to the steep slant of the knoll, this was one floor lower than the ground floor of the main structure, and was reached through a covered stairway leading from one of the two doors in the lower story.

In this wing Sheriff Jacob Butts had his office, several unbarred rooms for records and the use of his deputies, and a small section with a modern steel cage for the reception of prisoners. The ground floor of the old fort above was used by the sheriff and his son-in-law, William Avery, as a residence.

The criminals were all incarcerated on the upper floor of the old fort, reached by a broad stairway opening into a long hall above, with the cells on either side. Entrance to this sole method of egress and ingress from the upper floor was protected by a modern steel door, covered by a second one, locking over it, which was solid, whereas the inner one was only of bars. At night both doors were locked.

Sheriff Butts was a thrifty soul. His emoluments were chiefly fees, and he managed the jail on a system of efficiency that was unique and economical. William Avery acted as jailer and turnkey. All prisoners, with one exception, were kept locked in the cells upstairs. Jailer Avery allowed one to roam the corridor, and to come down and either shout through the barred door or rap on the steel one over it, when anything was wanted.

Claude Cutler Fitch was "taken over" by Captain Overton and delivered to the custody of Sheriff Butts. His extremely precarious situation was rendered even more unenviable, since Mr. Fitch, as one of a committee of "representative citizens," had taken a flyer in local politics in the last county election and backed another man for sheriff.

Mr. Butts, however, betrayed less of umbrage than he did of serene satisfaction at thus having the chief Philistine of them all delivered into his power. He searched Mr. Fitch thoroughly and with Jailer Avery took him to the top floor of the jail, where he was ensconced in the middle of three large and roomy cells at present unoccupied.

The door to this cell was of steel and had an orifice only large enough to permit a man's head to be wormed through it, or a pan of food passed in.

It had a huge lock and, in addition, was protected by two huge hinged bars at top and bottom, which were padlocked to enormous staples firmly set into the old dividing walls of the pre-Revolutionary block-house.

There were two windows in the thick outside walls affording light and air. They were crisscrossed by three separate sets of steel bars, also cemented into the ancient wall of limestone.

Noble Howard bade him be of good cheer and told him that he would see him the following morning not only about his case, but also to arrange certain details of Mr. Fitch's business. A man of affairs cannot be entirely withdrawn from his usual avocations, even on the ugly accusation of murder, without some adjustments of his former activities, such as signing payrolls and the like. Noble Howard cut the Gordian knot by preparing, that night, a blanket power of attorney for his client, that the various details could go on, uninterrupted by Mr. Fitch's imprisonment.

"Mrs. Avery will send you up a good supper," said Sheriff Butts, as he aided his son-in-law to buckle the prisoner in for the night. "Meals such as you are accustomed to will be extra, you know."

"All right," said Mr. Fitch apathetically. "Anything else?"

"You can have all the newspapers and books you want," leered Mr. Butts, thinking of how the *Times* had "panned him" during the last campaign.

"Send me in the local and city papers and some magazines," said Mr. Fitch mechanically. "How about soap and towels and water?"

Mr. Butts chortled: "I'll give you a valet. Hey, Pancake!"

From the frowsy and dingy steel lined corridor appeared a stocky figure, clad in a sleeveless old gray woolen shirt, whose sinewy arms were grotesquely tattooed.

The fellow had a serio-comic face, freckled, with sparse sandy hair, but his strong nose and dominant chin gave it the lie. The

neck was that of a gladiator, the round head seemed designed to receive blows, and bore several ugly scars. But his eyes were positively merry, for one in jail, and they danced in rhythm to the flickering gas jet above the door of Mr. Fitch's cell.

"This is Pancake Hearn," said Mr. Butts. "He's the runner for the boys in here. He'll get you anything that you want, and he'll be reasonable about tips, won't you, Pancake?"

"I'm always reasonable when in stir," smiled Pancake. "Yessir, I'm on the job. How long you in for?"

Mr. Butts said the evening papers would give details of Mr. Fitch's case. He interpreted the latter's perfunctory assent for "some nice lamb chops, sliced tomatoes, French fried potatoes, biscuits and coffee, with fresh peaches for dessert," as an order, and disappeared with his jailer son-in-law down the stairs.

"Well," observed Pancake Hearn in a husky but confidential tone, after carefully noting the clang of the locking doors at the foot of the stairway, "we meet again. Dis is a funny woild. Just a week ago, I'm standin', takin' the air out in front of the post office in this happy little city, watchin' the poor push-cart men at their honest but humble woik, and who goes by but youse in a limmyseen.

"And then who comes up but Lieutenant Overton in plain clothes. He makes me mugg. He runs me in. He ain't got a thing more on me than they probably got on youse. But here we both are—hey?"

His droll air and the acute sense of needed comradeship in his new environment rather appealed to Mr. Fitch. For the first time his look of high disdain faded out. The ghost of a smile flitted about his lips.

"What are you in for?" he queried.

"Oh, they got enough lined up agin me—on paper—to make the devil go off in the woods for a cry of jealousy," explained Pancake. "But when they get all through wid their papers, they can go and take a jump through their own hat-bands, for all of me. I ain't worrying. Dey say that I blowed your safe a year ago, down at the mills. But we're friends just the same, ain't we?"

Mr. Fitch, then and there, assured Pancake that so far as he was personally concerned, he would not be likely to press the charge. Pancake nodded.

"I seen a pitcher of the frail," said he, "that they say you cooked the mayor for knockin'. Boss, I never owned a steel mill in my hull life. But take it from me, if I owned a dozen bigger than them youse have in your hip pocket when youse are outside, I'da cooked him myself. She is *some* frail! Not that I believe you done it, either. Hello, here's the supper bell for the petty larceny ghosts and the hop-head brigade. 'Scuse me!"

CHAPTER VII.

IN LIEU OF OPERA.

DENIED the privilege of visiting grand opera in the city that night as he had planned, Mr. Fitch was not averse to a substitute performance staged after his evening meal.

Pancake served his supper with deft steps; even offered him a home-made cigarette, which Mr. Fitch declined with thanks.

"I'll send for some of my own cigars," said he, "when my lawyer comes over tomorrow."

"Well," said Pancake, "lawyers are all right to lug in stuff and if a guy is plannin' a crush-out, he can use an off-color lawyer to slip a note to a pal; but I never thought they earned their money myself. Out in Denver, once, I was grabbed by the gorillas and I hadn't even sized up a box to blow yet. I'm a peter man, you know—safes only."

"The gorillas grabbed me, as I was sayin', and into the hoosegow I went. Havin' nothin' on me, they stuck me in a cell wid a big steam pipe runnin' through it, and I was parboiled before being took down to court. The court give me a lawyer. The next court give me a year less one day, because of that lawyer. I wouldn't give a lawyer the bone left from your lamb chop to try to git me out of here."

Pancake Hearn removed the bones in question. He took them down to the end of the hall, out of sight of any other pris-

oner. Ere depositing it in the garbage can, he wrote a short note and wedged it in a sinew still clinging to the bone.

GOOSE-EYE:

I got a hunch I'll leave the boardin' house in a day or two. Have the mob by the blacksmith shop on the crick. I'll lam right down that way. Keep under cover, but have tools ready. The moke that owns the dump has agreed to give me pertection. He's in here for cookin' the mayor. PANCAKE.

Escorted by Jailer Avery with a drawn gun, Pancake took the carefully covered garbage can down the stairs and out behind the jail. He left it, still carefully covered, took an empty one, reentered the jail and walked sedately back to his post as majordomo of the top floor.

Barely was he within the structure when a shadow flitted out from behind Sheriff Butts's barn. It whipped off the cover to the can, seized the note and melted away into the umbra of the night.

Pancake procured a deck of cards and shuffled them. From the opposite cells several faces came and went. Pancake handed each of them five cards, took five himself, and also dealt five more face down on the table, one at a time.

He scanned his hand. The three men inside the other cell did the same. The first said: "Give me the widow!" Pancake passed in the five cards lying on the table and dropped the other five, still face down, in their place.

One hand reached out and picked up one card, replacing it with one. Another did the same. Then Pancake said: "I close it!"

From within the man who had demanded and received "the widow" declared: "Two pair, nines and sixes." "Three jacks," said the next in turn, and the third announced: "Three deuces."

Pancake grunted: "I only got a pair o' aces." He pushed the table aside a little, straightened himself up near the door through which came derisive laughter and jeering admonitions to "stand close."

"Aw, I'm game!" asseverated Pancake, covering up his eye with his five cards and submitting to five welts from each of three hands on the tip of his strong nose.

It glowed like a beacon of hope to Mr.

Fitch, who, in lieu of the grand opera planned, was coerced to substitute the somewhat less edifying pastime of "nosey-poker" for an hour.

Then Mr. Fitch walked over to one of the windows and looked silently down on the city. The *Times* building, with its three upper floors glowing brilliantly, was plainly visible from the dingy murk of the night.

A light also twinkled from his own mansion on the hill.

Mr. Fitch disrobed and crawled between new blankets. He slept. So did Pancake Hearn and his friends, for at nine o'clock the order of "lights out" went into effect. Jailer Avery took his farewell peek at the prisoners and retraced his steps, locking both doors at the foot of the stairway before seeking his own couch.

But there was no sleep for Hank Thomas.

He was writing his "lead" for the story of the inquest. It didn't run as smoothly as it should. Hank lighted a stogy. The muse was still coy.

Hank slipped out of the office and down the elevator from the city room. He ascended the hill leading to the Circle. He reached the Fitch mansion and walked over toward the plants that James Montgomery Hardy had mentioned.

He did not look long at them. Instead, he suddenly stooped and picked up a small, dark cylindrical object with a rather frayed end and looked at it curiously.

He dropped the object into his side pocket almost furtively, his mind flashing back to a scene of the inquest during Mrs. Meredith's testimony, when she was telling what little she knew of her nephew's movements the night of the mayor's demise.

The front door opened and Attorney Noble Howard stepped out. With him was Miss Dale.

"Oh, hello," said the lawyer. "Were you looking for me?"

The reporter seemed diffident. "I would like to chat with you if you're going down town."

"Come up and meet Miss Dale," said Howard. "This is Mr. Thomas, the reporter for the *Times*. Between you and me," added Howard to the scribe, "we've been trying to form a mutual comfort so-

ciety for the past few minutes, to cheer up Mrs. Meredith. She is hard hit by this lamentable affair."

"Oh," said the girl, with a widening of the eyes, as the reporter acknowledged the introduction, "I'm rather glad to see you—although you would never guess why."

"I've got to go back and write up this inquest," said Hank, "so I won't exhaust my feeble powers of conjecture in advance. By the way, I forgot to notice what you were wearing to-day. That, of course, is news."

"You were very nice not to stare at me like the rest," said Dorothy. "I appreciated the back of your head very much in that first trying moment. It was—well, it seemed like a sort of a landing place after a stormy voyage—if you understand what I mean."

"Perfectly," drawled Hank.

In spite of the grisly shadow of tragedy which had fallen over the mansion and its owner, Miss Dale and Howard both laughed. Hank merely breathed a little more freely. He felt rather guilty with that object in his side coat pocket, and wondered whether he ought to mention it and his conjectures regarding it.

CHAPTER VIII

HANK WRITES HIS STORY.

"HOW did the inquest look to you?" asked Howard. "Could you see any hope for Mr. Fitch at all?"

"I was pretty busy watching how the chaps from the city described Miss Dale," evaded Hank, "and afterward I was almost overcome by the way Mr. Myers played his legal overture. It was like a good pianist practicing something from Liszt. His technique was flawless."

"I am quite sure," said Miss Dale, "that it is all a horrid mistake. Certainly, Mr. Fitch had no idea of killing any one when he went upstairs that evening, although he knew Mr. Marshall was coming to call."

"Why," asked Howard, after a keen look at the reporter, "do you refer to Myers in that way?"

"Because," drawled Hank, "he seemed

to have his music all made up. It wasn't an inquest, it was a first rehearsal of what he'll play with symphonic effects later on at Mr. Fitch's trial."

"Music?" echoed the puzzled lawyer.

"He assumed that Mr. Fitch fired the shot; he made every circumstance dovetail into that assumption; but why did he assume Mr. Fitch fired it?"

"Well, why should he not—after Mrs. Meredith's testimony?"

Hank looked at Miss Dale. "May I speak right out in meetin'?"

"You surely may," said she. "We're thinking about Mr. Fitch's plight and not about my sensitiveness."

"The fragmentary evidence of Mrs. Meredith," said the reporter, "was more of a presumption that whatever the mayor said might have inflamed Mr. Fitch to a murderous rage than conclusive evidence that it actually did. For myself, had I been in Mr. Fitch's shoes, I might have been tempted to kick the mayor out the front door, where I had tossed the stub of a cigar when I came down to the library to see him; but as to shooting him dead—that is quite another thing. Mr. Fitch seems a phlegmatic sort. Then, again, unless he knew in advance that he was likely to shoot Marshall, why would he bring his pistol down with him? And, granting both these curious conclusions, why would he select his own library for the crime? The pistol was last seen in his den, according to the testimony."

"Myers will use that circumstance on the trial to show premeditation and thus fortify his demand for a verdict of first degree murder," said Howard.

"Of course," said Hank, "but what of it? Having started to play Liszt, you can't expect him to switch to a fox-trot. May I ask a question, in confidence?"

"Surely," said Howard.

"What does Mr. Fitch say about the affair?"

"Very little as yet, save to reiterate stubbornly what he also told O'Brien. I'm to see him to-morrow morning and will then try to elicit other facts, including all the conversation he had with the late mayor. He was not well to-day, and his mental

state was such that I did not press for information. I had little hope of clearing him at this inquest, but did hope to get Myers to disclose his hand."

Hank chewed his stodgy restlessly in a little silence. Dorothy Dale, appraising him rather intently, next said: "You have something else on your mind, I'm rather sure. Would you mind telling us why you think Mr. Myers might have formed any other conclusion than that Mr. Fitch did shoot Mr. Marshall?"

"Mrs. Meredith's testimony suggested such a possibility," drawled the reporter, "although it might cast suspicion on you, Miss Dale, if voiced to others. It's merely a theory, of course, but it shows that Myers may have been wrong. If his rehearsal is wrong, his next recital, with variations, is likely to be more erroneous."

Dorothy nodded gravely. "I don't in the least mind hearing any theory," said she naïvely, "since I'm very much interested in exonerating Mr. Fitch, if he is, as I prefer to think he is, entirely innocent. And, I'd like to see whoever killed Mr. Marshall punished—if whoever did can be apprehend. He was always very nice to me, and I'm sure he felt a sincere interest in my welfare, although I have no idea at all how these men came to quarrel over me—as Mrs. Meredith testified."

The reporter nodded in turn.

"Nor have I. And I don't think you knew any more than you said you knew to-day. My conjecture is pure theory. I use it to show Mr. Myers may be mistaken in his first premise."

"Now, Mrs. Meredith said, in her opinion, that you could not have gone through the hall from your room after she left it, to the rear of the house, and down the servants' stairway and along the lower hall and toward the front; and then, conceivably, have shot Mr. Fitch yourself, between the time she left you and the time she heard the shot."

"No," interpolated Howard. "Because she was 'barely inside the room,' when she heard the shot from the library."

Hank shook his head and smiled. "Mrs. Meredith didn't say just that," he rejoined. "Mr. Myers put those identical words into

her mouth. In her state of mind she assented to his statement. And, of course, every one took it for granted."

"But I don't get your point?" said Noble Howard a trifle testily.

"I haven't stated it yet," said Hank Thomas. "This is the point: Owing to Mr. Myers putting those words into Mrs. Meredith's mouth, every one overlooked the fact that Miss Dale, we will say, might have come down the *front* way—passing Mrs. Meredith's closed door without being seen—*after* she knew the mayor was in the library; shot the mayor with Mr. Fitch's pistol, tossed it into the room between the two men and then hurried up the *back* way to her room without being seen."

"Oh," gasped Dorothy, "I see what you are driving at. You mean any one might have been in the hall below and shot Mr. Marshall in the same way and got out before Mrs. Meredith came down?"

"What was to hinder?" asked Hank.

Howard shook his head. "It's attractive as a pure conjecture, but it fails to take into consideration how some one else might have got Mr. Fitch's pistol."

The reporter grinned. "You might ask Mr. Fitch about that when you see him to-morrow," said he. "Well, folks, I must get back to the office."

Howard turned to Miss Dale when Hank Thomas had passed out of earshot.

"Don't build any false hopes on what he said," he adjured. "This is a very, very bad business. I'm at my wits' end about Claude."

"It's very bad," she agreed, "but do you know Mr. Thomas didn't tell us what was in his mind at all. Can it be possible, do you think, that he thinks I killed my father's old friend and mine?"

"No, I don't think it was that," said Howard, "although I'm also inclined to think he held something back. But then he's a newspaper man and, in things like these, a shrewd reporter generally keeps his tongue in his cheek. But he's not half bad."

Hank Thomas did not hurry straight back to the office. He stopped, instead, at a drug store and bought a little sliding box and some waxed paper. The thing he had

picked up he wrapped in it, with much solicitude. Then he wrapped the box, after sealing it securely, addressed it to a man in the metropolis whose name he got from the classified telephone directory and, when he had written his story of the inquest and turned in his "stuff," he also wrote the same man a letter.

His chief read the "stuff."

"Hank, you're a prize," said he. "This is the kind of a story we needed, but I hated to ask you to write it. It makes any one think Mr. Fitch is dead innocent."

"I wanted him to think I felt that way," drawled the reporter non-committally, as he lounged out to mail his letter. Then after consulting his notebook, he wrote down several paragraphs in it, in a precise hand. This done, he strolled over to a garage, where the night man looked up the records and told him his motorcycle would be ready for him the next morning.

Hank thanked him and went to bed.

CHAPTER IX.

IN MID AIR.

"HEY, boss!"

Claude Cutler Fitch woke from a slumber so profound that he was hardly conscious of his environment at first.

Peering at him from a sheet of steel was what seemed to be a gargoyle with an animated face—a grotesque countenance plucked from some medieval cathedral.

"Will it be grapefruit and eggornas and toast and coffee?" queried Pancake Hearn, whose head was inserted in the oval orifice with the square bottom cut in the cell door. "And, yer majesty, here's the whole bloom-in' world talkin' about you. Yer lawyer will be here at nine o'clock and, until then, you can read wot a high-minded hero you are in the poipers."

He withdrew his head and tossed in a sheaf of them.

Then he instructed his charge to come to the door and hold out a bowl, into which Pancake poured hot water from a tea kettle. "Bill Avery crabbed about the hot water," said he, "but as soon as you grease

him, he'll quit crabbin'. How do you like yer eggs?"

Mr. Fitch was still reading at nine o'clock when his attorney was admitted.

"How do you feel, Claude?" asked Noble Howard.

"I was looking at the trial jury's faces as they filed in with a verdict of 'guilty as charged,' until I read the *Times*. That chap showed a little sense. He didn't set the electrocution quite so close, at least."

"I talked with him last night," said Noble Howard. "Come over by the window. Of course, the *Times* would treat you leniently, since you are a part owner of it, you know."

Mr. Fitch's look of high disdain merged into one of surprise.

"I didn't know it," said he emphatically. "How did that come about?"

"Why, it was one of the trust securities that your father left you," said his attorney. "I thought you'd looked them over."

"I looked over the list and the dividends the different stuff was paying and added up the total," said Mr. Fitch. "Well, what about my case?"

Noble Howard tossed his hat on Mr. Fitch's unmade couch and drew a chair close to him.

"What else can you tell me about what happened in the library?"

"About the shooting?"

"Before and after it. You knew Ordway Marshall was coming. How did you know that?"

"Why, when Mordaunt came to drive me home from the mills, I stopped uptown to get a box of cigars. I sent him in for them as usual. While I waited for him to come out of the tobacconist's, along came the mayor. He came toward the machine. I opened the door and spoke to him."

"What did he say?"

"I said: 'Good evening, Ordway. How is everything going with you?' He said the municipal business was going fairly well; I think he said something about just coming from a meeting with some commission or other—"

"About a push-cart ordinance?" asked Howard.

His client nodded. "Then I asked him

if I could give him a lift home, and he said no. So I waited for him to say whatever he had in mind when he came over to speak to me, if anything."

"Anything else?" asked Howard.

Mr. Fitch said the mayor had asked if he would be in town during the next few days; that he had replied he was going to the city the next day; that he didn't know just when he would be back; that the mayor then said he would like to drop up and see him that evening, if he could spare the time; that he had invited him to come up and have dinner, but the mayor had a meeting of the city council to attend, and said he would "step up as soon as it was adjourned, if it wouldn't be too late," as the matter was one he wanted to discuss before Mr. Fitch went away.

"I left the date open," said Mr. Fitch, "and told him to come up that evening, if I fitted his plans and I would chat with him."

"Did he then say what he was going to talk about?"

"No. Not a word. I didn't know but it might be about the mills; some ordinance, perhaps, or something about the police arrangements—or the fire protection—I had no inkling whatever."

"But he gave you an inkling when he arrived?"

"He talked off the key at first," said Mr. Fitch, frowning. "Apologized for coming so late, but said they had been discussing the same 'push-cart' ordinance, and he was opposed by aldermen from the south part of town; and had to use police figures to win them over. I wasn't interested—besides, I wasn't feeling just myself."

Noble Howard glanced at him sharply.

"Go on," he urged. "What next?"

Mr. Fitch seemed nervous. "I wish I had a smoke to steady my nerves," said he. "Noble, when you leave, will you have Mordaunt go to the house and ask either my aunt or Miss Dale to go to my den and send me over a box of cigars—my own brand?"

"Surely. I don't smoke myself, Claude, so you'll have to manage without it. Try and think connectedly, please, for your own sake no less than mine."

"I'll try. But it's all rather hazy—I suppose owing to the shock. Ordway began talking about the old time families and then his conversation touched on Miss Dale's great-grandfather. Then he stopped, and looked at me. I didn't know what he was driving at. In fact, Noble, as I said before, I wasn't quite myself. I was sort of—well, not sleepy, exactly, but I felt queer. So I waited for him to go on. I was a little impatient, for he seemed so indirect. He started in by asking me next if I knew Miss Dale's maternal great-grandfather's name. I said I thought he was a Benton."

"Yes, what next?"

"Well, he looked at me in a way I didn't just fancy. Then he said: '*You think so?*' His tone and manner were very irritating. I looked at him, for I didn't comprehend what this was all about.

"Then I said: '*Yes, that is what I said. I think so.*'"

"Did he reply?"

"He almost sneered in my face. He said: '*Dont' you know it—for a fact?*'"

"I said: '*I suppose I have known it, at some time, but the matter of Miss Dale's remoter relatives is one with which I have little or no concern, although I esteem Miss Dale rather highly.*'"

Noble Howard leaned forward. "And then?" he whispered sepulchrally.

There was a clamor at the door. Claude Cutler Fitch looked annoyed. The look of disdain deepened on his face as the barriers were formally removed, the door swung wide and Sheriff Butts and his son-in-law, the latter with a small sledge, came in. The official's manner was important.

"Scuse me, gents," said Sheriff Butts, "but we are having the regular morning inspection of cells."

He moved to the window. Son-in-law Avery solemnly whanged each bar of those on the windows in a vigorous manner. The whole cell rang with the deafening clamor.

Neither of the men within it said a word until they were again alone and locked in. Then Noble picked up the conversation where it had left off.

"What did Ordway say next?"

"His exact words escape me," said Fitch,

rumpling his hair with a nervous gesture. "But their import made me angry."

"Their import?" echoed the attorney.

"Ordway said something like this: '*I'm surprised that you take that kind of an attitude regarding matters vital to Dorothy Dale's future.*' That, in substance. I said: '*What do you mean?*' He said: '*You know what I mean?*' I just looked at him."

"And then?" breathed Noble Howard. His query was almost as fervent as a prayer.

"He made no reply, but the nasty, sneering look on his face was enough. I do not know that I could tell you my own reply, unless I had heard Aunt Cora's testimony yesterday. According to her, it was here where I said: '*You hound! Do you mean to insinuate that I could entertain dishonorable motives toward a divine girl like that?*'"

"I get you," said his counsel. "Can you remember what happened next in the library?"

"Oh, in a way. He got up on his dignity. Said he didn't indulge in insinuations. I told him, rather sharply, that I'd thank him to come to the point then. He said he would. And, back he went to Miss Dale's ancestors again—although why he did I don't know. Began vaguely talking about the way the place was settled—all that sort of stuff—her folks and mine. Finally I said: '*Ordway, why the genealogy? What is it?*'"

"You remember that?"

"Fairly well. I sort of roused up, although I was heavy. Then he said he'd get to the point without delay. He took out some papers and began running through them. I waited. Then he rose. Now, until that instant, we had not exchanged a word for several minutes—I'm rather sure—although I was under a curious strain and the time seemed rather drawn out, as it does when your nerves are taut."

"Yes."

"All the time Ordway was there I was in the same chair that I still sat in when O'Brien came in. From there I watched him. I wasn't exactly angry—more perplexed. Ordway said something about papers in his raincoat. He started to get up. From there on the whole thing seemed

unreal; and the more I think on it, the more unreal it still seems."

Howard nodded sympathetically.

"I think," went on his client, "that he got as far as the corner of the library table. At the time I had a feeling he was going to the hall to get his raincoat and get these papers he mentioned—whatever they were. I didn't know—but, just then, something else happened."

"Now, just what next happened? Take it easy and tell it—your impressions included."

"I heard a report. I saw something fall to the rug. I saw Ordway sag down. That's all I know."

The lawyer looked nonplused. "Wasn't there anything else?" he persisted.

"Something," said his client, "but it was so unreal—well, I hesitate to mention it."

"Please do."

"I thought I saw that silk umbrella I gave Dorothy on her birthday hanging in the air, near the library table. But I'm not sure. It was rather weird—that and the shot—and his sagging down. I rubbed my eyes to make sure. Then I didn't see it."

"Where was it?"

"It seemed to be in the air, between the table and the curtains—I'll be hanged if I know."

"You'll be electrocuted if we can't find out," said Noble Howard.

His client shrugged.

"I am in your hands," said he.

CHAPTER X.

LOOSE ENDS.

MR. FITCH'S last trite remark no less than his incredible story left his attorney nonplused. It would never do—at all. Myers would riddle such a defense mercilessly, with his incisive analysis and scathing summing up.

"See here, Claude," he expostulated, "the shadow of the chair—"

Mr. Fitch grinned sardonically.

"My dear fellow, the morning papers, except the *Times*, are full of that shadow, except where casual references to my chiv-

alry and wads about Dorothy's seraphic beauty do not blind the readers to the bald fact that Ordway Marshall was foully murdered, almost within a hand-breadth of me.

"Now, that *Times* chap showed faint gleams of almost human intelligence. He points out that had I become genuinely enraged, I might have kicked Ordway out of the house, unless he either apologized or explained his cryptic allusions to Dorothy and myself; but as for killing him, out of hand, the contention is unsound if not absurd."

"Myers doesn't think so," pithily retorted Howard.

"I regret I have only one life to lose to add to Mr. Myers's already well established reputation as a human bloodhound. So why shouldn't he convict me for something I didn't do, if he can, to add to his reputation?"

Howard, from the tail of his eye, noted the look of "ducal disdain" which was quite marked on his client's face. More and more bewildered, he blurted:

"What about your pistol on the rug?"

"That's all rot!"

"But it's your pistol. And the bullet that killed the mayor fitted it. You only heard one report and one chamber is discharged."

"I'll explain that, Noble. Some weeks ago a stray cat was making life hideous one night with a serenade quite unlike Schubert's. I took a pot-shot at him or her out of the window. If you can find that feline and get his or her affidavit—"

"Then you didn't bring the pistol down with you when Ordway came?"

"The only deadly weapon I had was a sheaf of opera tickets. I told Aunt Cora, as she testified, to have an early breakfast for me as I was going to the city."

"Was the pistol in your den when you came down?"

"I don't recall seeing it for a long time. Yes, so far as I know."

"Why didn't you summon some one when this mysterious shot was fired?"

"At first I was absolutely numbed and dazed. I sat looking at Ordway like a man in a trance. I saw his face flash with surprise, then contort with pain. I thought—when I finally realized he was hurt—that

he had shot himself, but the reason for that, too, was beyond even a wild conjecture of mine. Then, as I looked at the rug, I saw my own pistol blinking up at me. And again I stared at that—numbed afresh and more dazed."

"You recognized the pistol?"

"At first no more clearly than I had recognized that silk umbrella. Only when O'Brien got there the pistol was still real and there was no sign of an umbrella."

Into Noble Howard's fine eyes there came a sudden gleam of hope. To hide it he looked out of the window casually.

"How did this umbrella appear—open or closed?"

"Spread wide open—unless I had an hallucination—and I never had one before that I know of. I can almost see that figured Persian silk pattern right now. Only, while it was open, it was also tilted, sharply, at an angle as though some one might be holding the handle—but, of that, I cannot be at all sure—the impression is too vague in details. Ordway's shocking death, too, makes other things seem misty and dim."

"But if you felt that way why in the name of goodness didn't you summon help?"

"Noble, I don't quite know. I had an odd feeling, not unlike being chained to the chair. Then, before I could shake this off, I saw my aunt's face look in through the curtains. I told her, then, to send for an officer. After that I sat quite still in the chair, because, chiefly, I wanted to be able to state, on my oath before my Maker, that I had not moved from it before or after entering that room. And this feeling, too, was in consonance with my unusual physical lassitude—I was 'all in'—although I don't know why. You see, my whole story is highly improbable."

"Not if you are holding nothing back, Claude."

"I'm not, upon my honor. But, with it all, there was a feeling of a kind I can't define—dull rage at such a thing happening—as well as that feeling of lassitude. For instance, I was growing more angry at the poor devil dying there on the floor than I had been at what he had said—although what had killed him was evidently as much

a mystery to him as it was to me. You see, I'm candid with you."

"Did Ordway say another word?"

"I think he started to speak. But, as he opened his lips, the blood gushed out."

Howard nodded. "A shot through the lung generally does bring that effect," said he. "Do you remember anything else?"

"It seemed a very short time before O'Brien came in. I was still trying to figure out what had happened."

"But, Claude, didn't you realize that if Ordway had been shot by some out *outside* of the library, you should have rushed out and looked for the person that did it?"

"That thought first came to me after I saw my aunt's face. Not before. Then I realized that it could not have been she. You heard her testimony. Bear in mind, at first, I thought Ordway had shot himself. Until I recognized my pistol, I thought this, absolutely. Then I doubted it. Next, it seemed to me—equally absurd, of course—that perhaps an invisible person holding that lost umbrella had shot him. The whole affair reacted on me so terribly that the minute I was locked up in that wretched cell I grew deathly sick. The odor of the place was insufferable."

"This place isn't quite so bad," said Noble Howard. "By the way, I have prepared a power of attorney for you to sign. It will lessen complications and will enable me to look after this case more closely."

He took out the paper and extended it toward his client, who waved it away.

"I'll sign it whenever you come with a notary. I trust you, Noble, implicitly. Besides, what does it matter? After such an experience as I have been through, it sickens me to think of ordinary things. I had no especial affection for Marshall, but the poor devil had just as much right to live as you or I. And, as God is my judge, I don't know what happened beyond what I have told you."

"I'll lay a bet that you don't, too," said Howard, emphatically. "And that's where I'm going to slip Mr. Myers a nice little lemon. He'll wake up, but he'll be too late. Now, to-morrow, I'm coming down for another conference with you. I may have company—Dorothy is wild about this."

"Dorothy is the right sort," said Claude Cutler Fitch. "I've always esteemed her."
"You put it mildly," suggested his attorney.

Mr. Fitch smiled cryptically.

"Between you and that chap on the *Times*, I really don't feel so badly about all of it. There is something else—something that I can't fathom."

"You bet there is," said Noble Howard. "And now, having told me the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth—just stick to it, if I ask you to tell it over again in another conference, will you?"

"Why should I alter it?"

"You shouldn't, Claude. So, stick to it. Truth moves mountains. Maybe it will open this cell door. I'm going to take a pry at the hinges, anyway."

"Thanks, Noble. Please don't forget my cigars. Send Mordaunt with them if not too much bother."

When the lawyer stepped out of the jail, he met Hank Thomas lounging near by.

"You're up early," he said.

"You know the proverb about the bird and the worm," drawled Hank. "How is our worm?"

"I left him in better spirits. He is grateful for the way you reported the inquest."

"Did you ask him about the pistol?"

"He didn't bring it from the den with him. He said he hadn't seen it for some weeks that he remembered. I can't go into details at this time of my client's story to me, Mr. Thomas. But I can say definitely that he has a splendid defense and one that will undoubtedly acquit him."

"When can you tell me anything more?"

"To-morrow," said Noble Howard sentimentously, "I am to have another conference with him. It will be in the morning. I should say—well, about eleven o'clock. If you'll keep mum meanwhile, and will meet me here, you may have a surprise in the way of news."

"I'll be as loquacious as a monkey wrench," drawled Hank, "but, as I still have a place between my two ears, designed to receive bread and butter, you don't mind if I suggest in general terms that something of the kind is due to come off—not to-morrow—but at the trial?"

"You are a young man after my own heart," smiled Attorney Howard.

"And bread and butter," supplemented the lanky reporter as he left him to mount his motor cycle.

He whirled a corner. Just beyond a push cart man nearly fouled his machine. To avoid him Hank drove up on the curb, in this old part of town merely a slanting bank of sod, where the grade of a modern street had been cut below that of the ancient sidewalk.

Hank slithered back into the street. He stopped to button his coat. Looking back, he found that he was in view of the end of the old fort which served as a jail. The push cart man was staring at it.

Hank drove back to the garage where he kept his machine.

"Tune her up a bit more, Tony," said he to the machinist. "She hasn't much pep."

"Awright," said the mechanic.

As Hank turned to leave he remarked: "Say, why don't your friends get a little free advertising in your paper?"

"What do you mean?"

"You made it look in the *Times* this morning as if Morduant was a reg'lar mechanic. If that Portugee stiff can adjust a set of timin' gears I'll eat your motor cycle raw. He can't hardly change a tire. Only been a chauffeur about six months. Why, one day, he come in here, his machine back-firin' and missin'. He talked about them gears then. But he only forgot to pull down his choker on the gas feed. The mixture she was gettin' was rich enough to bankrupt his boss."

Hank laughed, tolerantly. "What made him pull that pose?"

"Aw, he's tryin' to climb onto a dead man's shoulders to make folks believe he's a reg'lar chauffeur-mechanic. Ain't his boss in jail? Where's his job gone if his boss goes to the chair?"

The reporter nodded absently. He was still mulling over Mr. Howard's changed attitude. Last night he had been frankly timorous. To-day he was almost oracular in speaking of a "splendid defense" and a "big surprise."

In this frame of mind Hank sought the

restaurant where he breakfasted. Still thinking, he strolled out on the street.

Then he heard his name called.

He looked up. Mr. Fitch's limousine was standing at the curb. Mordaunt, immaculate, was at the wheel, and Dorothy Dale, smiling as if no shadow of tragedy existed, was beckoning to him.

Hank doffed his hat as he walked over toward her.

CHAPTER XI.

THE JAILBREAK.

AS he reached the vehicle she leaned back in her seat, drawing back her head with a slight gesture pregnant with fresh mystery. The reporter bent his tall, angular figure and thrust his head well within the machine's luxurious interior to catch her whisper, the scent of flowers—and his own breath.

Dorothy Dale was no longer merely beautiful in the static sense. She had become dynamically enchanting, and Hank Thomas, suddenly self-conscious of his own gawky appearance, felt acutely diffident.

"Isn't it glorious—the news?"

"I—I don't just understand," he stammered.

"Of course you don't. So I'll explain—in confidence, of course. I've just been to the jail and they let me in and I saw Claude. Poor boy! He was so glad to see me, although when Mr. Howard asked me to send him some cigars he suggested letting Mr. Mordaunt take them over. But I took them myself. Only no one knows I took them. I just thought if the law was mean enough to lock up Claude in such a horrid place and for such a silly reason as they gave—his being in love with me, as they said—why, I'd break one of their old laws just for spite."

Hank grinned. "But that isn't all."

"How shrewd you are," complained the girl archly. "No, it isn't. Claude told me that Noble told him that after a conference to-morrow he'd try and pry loose the hinges on that door—meaning, he'd get him out. But you won't say anything?"

"Mr. Howard told me something of the

same sort and we came to an understanding already as to how it was to be used, if at all, in the news."

"I'm going to insist on accompanying Noble to-morrow. I *know* Claude is incapable of doing what they say he did. I have reasons—" She cut off with another mysterious but enchanting smile.

"—and I may tell you when he's out of there," she added, "why he *wouldn't* do such a thing—especially for such a silly reason."

"I'm much obliged," said Hank, "and I hope Mr. Fitch gets out."

The words seemed flat and stale to him as he watched her whirl away. Such a girl was beyond description. Hank Thomas could only gesture impotently at the invisible stars to bear witness—and start for the office.

"Long distance wants you," said a boy as he came in.

Hank hurried to the booth. He emerged very perturbed, his brow beaded with cold sweat and a noxious dread clutching at his heart. He flew out of the *Times* office, hustled himself like a falling star to the ground floor, popped into another pay booth, and called Noble Howard's law office. Mr. Howard had gone to New York and would not be back until next day. Then he called the Fitch mansion and asked for Miss Dale.

Mrs. Meredith's quaver replied. Miss Dale was visiting friends and would be back late, if at all. Hank revealed his identity and asked if Mrs. Meredith contemplated a call on her nephew that afternoon.

"I told Mr. Howard," said the lady, "that I could never bear to see my only sister's only son in such a place. He agreed with me. He told me this morning he would not be in there long."

Hank hung up. He stepped into the lobby. It was a big building and was thronged with people. Among them Hank again discerned Mordaunt, who was standing near a granolithic pillar, with his back toward the reporter. Hank edged his way. Mordaunt was talking to a girl. She was rather pretty, and Hank's wild impulse to send the chauffeur in to see his master did not commend itself for several reasons—rea-

sons which Hank was already putting down in sequence with other stray facts in his notebook.

He skimmed the fringe of the throng, left the building, and sped to the garage where his motor cycle was kept. He mounted it, rode to the jail, composed himself before he entered the sheriff's office and lounged in, as casually as he could.

"May I have a word with Mr. Fitch?" he asked civilly enough, presenting his police pass and his credentials from the *Times* to Sheriff Butts.

"What do you want to see him about?"

"A certain phase of his case."

"Not on your life you can't."

"But, why not, sheriff?"

"Go and get an order from Mr. Myers. The *Times* panned me from hell to Hackney during the last campaign. I don't owe you fellows nothing."

"I didn't pan you. I've only been working here a short time."

"Get out!"

Hank went to Mr. Myers's office. Myers was frosty.

"You seem to think Fitch is being abused from the way you write," said he.

"I think there may be a mistake."

"Why?"

"I'd rather not state."

"Suppose I subpoena you to tell the grand jury?"

Hank grinned like a cornered rat. "I'll write my testimony in one word, without your subpoena," said he. He scribbled it and tossed it across the desk.

Myers read: "Conjecture!"

"I won't let you see Fitch," said he. "You might find your conjecture mutually contagious."

"May I use that in my story to-morrow?" asked Hank.

Myers did not reply in words. His look sufficed to say that he could not control a reporter, but he would be in office for some time and he had a good memory.

"It's now all on the knees of whatever gods worship Persian figured silk umbrellas," Hank told himself as he ambled, drearily, back to work.

"What's new?" asked the chief.

"The whole blooming yarn breaks wide

open to-morrow, with trimmings, and I've been tommyhawked twice—by the sheriff and by Myers, trying to get to see Mr. Fitch."

"Write it, and hold to the policy," said the other.

Hank sat down to his machine.

Next morning readers of the *Times* were regaled if not edified. Hank told how both sides were lining up for the trial, he created a "no-man-knows-land" so portentous that it bristled with verbal pitfalls, legal machine gun nests, and latent lethal devices of dim but no less ominous shape.

He hated every line of it.

Also, for reasons of his own, no less than the broad hint of Attorney Howard, he ensconced himself about eight o'clock next morning in a "strategic position" behind an old elm, and with his trusty motor cycle hidden behind a hedge.

A squalid pushcart man labored up the hill. He had a villainous face, but Hank lounged over and bought of his wares, and gave him a quarter for good luck, thereby unconsciously purchasing a bullet proof life insurance policy.

"T'anks, bo. Dis is not me reg'lar line," averred the squalid one.

"I'm in hard lines myself," drawled Hank. "This world ain't a bed of roses for a reporter in a millionaire murder case. So long," he waved and skirted the hedge without referring to the fellow's carelessness the day before.

From his vantage he watched the sheriff's office.

At just nine o'clock the Fitch limousine drew up and disgorged three men besides Attorney Howard, one wearing a white beard and a top hat. Mordaunt was driving and parked close to the curb directly in front of the steps leading into the office.

Ten minutes passed. Then, with a chorus of confused shouts from the interior of the old fort's annex, accompanying his appearance, a figure in a sleeveless gray army undershirt, with bare head topped by thin, sandy hair, catapulted through the entrance door into space in a leap that disdained steps.

In two more bounds the man was on the Fitch machine, and as he reached it, his

arm delivered a terrible and well aimed blow that lifted Simon Mordaunt clear of his seat and hurled him to the street below.

As Hank leaped over the hedge, heedless of the wind whipping off his hat, and ran, like a man in a dream, toward the fallen chauffeur, the machine glided, bounded and then ricocheted down the street, careening toward the corner ahead where the push cart man was standing.

The push cart folded up like a fan under the limousine's impact as Hank raised Mordaunt, whose inert body slipped through the folds of his clothes of its own weight, spilling some things from his inside pocket.

A folded bit of yellow paper was flirited by the wind across the narrow street and over the edge of the slope as Hank tried to pick up the insensible chauffeur. His eye, trailing its course, next instant caught a glimpse of Sheriff Butts falling down the steps in his haste, stumbling, recovering and firing wildly in the general direction of the limousine, now careening crazily around the corner, with the push cart proprietor clinging frantically to a door which some one within had opened.

Hank leaped toward the sheriff. The distance was too short to prevent the reporter's intervention, even at risk of his own life, from a second shot, which might have killed Dorothy Dale, whose blurred outline angled out of view as the limousine came broadside on.

The ping of a missile from that vehicle turned the air near Hank's own head into a long tuning fork, and then Sheriff Butts reeled, yowling like a cat smitten with a well aimed bootjack. His pistol clattered to the roadway and he clasped his wounded fingers.

Hank, with a transient wonder as to how the flying fugitive from the jail could have displayed such astounding shooting accuracy while guiding a ponderous vehicle around a corner and down a steep descent, vaulted the hedge like a greyhound, tore through it with his own motor cycle, and pointed down the hill after the limousine, just then turning the corner at the bottom into a straight road leading away from Downington and into a hilly and wooded country.

He took the corner with caution, but once in the stretch, there were two gas-driven "bats" roaring over the macadam, in a way to recall Sergeant O'Brien's testimony at the inquest of the late mayor of the city.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PURSUIT.

FROM the seat feloniously but no less effectively usurped from its legal driver, Pancake Hearn sent Claude Cutler Fitch's car slithering along the unfrequented highway like a demon.

He did not even scruple to ignore the State law about an open muffler; and as for the effect on tires, one would have thought from his recklessness that he had his erstwhile millionaire "pal's" entire wealth at his disposal.

From the flat top where he clung at full length to the metal rail designed, primarily, to hold merely a suit case or two if securely strapped, an individual called "Goose-eye," the erstwhile push cart gentleman who had been on hand to "cover" his pal's emergence from durance vile, peered wickedly over the sights of his automatic at the solitary pursuer on the motor cycle as he steadily gained on the ascents, now becoming more frequent as the road climbed out of the little vale in which commercial Downington nestled.

Finally Goose-eye sent his first warning shot shrilling over Hank Thomas's bare head. If Hank heard it he merely advanced his spark to the last possible notch and "gave her the gun" with the last spray of possible gas.

Goose-eye grinned. For five miles behind this chap there was no one else in sight.

The "crush" had been a howling success, judging by the ensemble of noises from the jail at Pancake's exit, and although, according to program it was a little premature—being scheduled to be "pulled off" with the aid of Goose-eye when Pancake "turned out with the garbage can" at nightfall, as usual, it was clearly up to the man on the top of the automobile to see to it that the

next phase of the plan was not "blowed open" by any presumptuous intruder.

He steadied his forearm as the limousine struck a hilly spot, where sand for a hundred yards or so replaced macadam.

Pancake, despite his momentum, was forced to "second speed" by the spinning rear wheels in the loose soil.

Hard behind came Hank Thomas, one palm uplifted—the token of peace to savages the world over.

Goose-eye grinned. Fifty yards nearer and he would "cook" this chap with a shot between the eyes.

Then he grumbled, replaced the safety catch to his weapon, and scrambled down by his pal, to whom the torrential roar of the approaching motor cycle now came audibly for the first time, above his own exhaust.

In a trice Hank Thomas was alongside.

Pancake glared at Goose-eye.

"Wot's eat'n' youse?" he demanded.

"Aw, he ain't no cop—"

"Gentlemen," said Hank Thomas, "there is a lady present. Please let her leave the machine. That's all."

"East Lynn stuff," gibbered Pancake.

"Well, dis ain't no time for carryin' added weight. Goose-eye, where's yer manners? Let the frail outa the side door."

"Thank you," said Hank as Dorothy Dale, rather disheveled as to hat and rather white as to face, stepped into the highway.

"Shoot!" said Goose-eye, leaping back beside Pancake. "What do you know about that guy? He ain't had no bringin' up. He didn't bawl me out yisterday, and he tipped me a quarter for them bananas dis mornin'. Also, when I sends him a lead bokay, he grins and keeps right on. How did youse spring dat joint? You come t'ru like it was wet paper."

"Me gardenen, the screw with the keys to the bedroom stairway, was takin' a nap, for one thing," grinned Pancake, as they rippled back to their former hectic speed. "The sheriff 'll ast him why, and he won't know. But, did youse pipe that frail? Well, she sprung me—only she don't know it, either. Some frail!"

"The guy wot cooked the mayor was also very much in on dis—but he don't

know it, neither. What folks don't know don't trouble 'em. The old Santa Claus wid the pink necktie that I rammed just over his watch-pocket, didn't do no advance worryin', either, when I came through a flock of respectability that was in the big room. Is the mob on hand?"

"Waitin' down by the old mill, accordin' to book," chanted Goose-eye. "Hennessy was up and give me the office last night. Well, let the old bus die a natural death—she's a good old bus, at that!"

"Suits me," said Pancake, shooting into an open field and heading for a thick woods.

It was here, an hour later, that the pursuing posse found the limousine, uninjured.

A driver of a vanload of furniture lumbering heavily toward Downington gave them directions which were essentially accurate, when the two autos of armed men recruited by Sheriff Butts hailed the stolid chap.

When they were two miles out of the ken of the driver and out of sight as well, owing to a bend in the road, he lifted the panel in the covered vehicle behind him and asked: "All right, Pancake?"

"Yep. Keep movin', Hennessy. Dese rube deppity sheruffs 'll git tired wadin' around in the swamps and barking their corns on the loose rocks, and they'll come straight home to git their names in the poipers. By then, Hennessy, we oughta have 'the little old man' on the box we're goin' after."

The pursuing posse, however, did not encounter any sign of either Hank Thomas or Miss Dorothy Dale on the road, owing to Hank's foresight. Besides, that was not their real objective.

And, in the interim, the reporter and the girl, after a few flurried inquiries and as hasty replies, in keeping with Hank's nimble-witted suggestion turned down another road, which led to the railway junction by which Downington was reached.

Hank had a supplemental seat and on this Miss Dale perched, although rather incongruously attired for such a method of traveling. At the little junction hotel where they brought up, Hank explained that the lady's car was "out of order," and she would entrain after a bite to eat.

It would be two hours before a train was due. While the meal was being made ready, the two strolled off for a chat, out of earshot.

Miss Dale looked curiously at the chap whose cross-section of life had impinged on her own the night of the tragedy. There were many things that she wanted to ask. But she forebore, while Hank, too, seemed to find it difficult to express what was on his mind.

Finally he blurted: "Have you seen or heard anything of your umbrella, since the inquest?"

"I heard of it." Then she told him the balance of Noble Howard's revelations to her of Mr. Fitch's weird story of the tragedy.

"I don't want to pry into your affairs," said Hank, "but may I ask what Mr. Howard's idea was, about his visit to the jail this morning? He told me yesterday that he would be there, this morning; and if I was around there, he'd let me in on a big piece of news. News, Miss Dale, is my bread and butter, as I told Mr. Howard, yesterday. I have no money except what I earn and I try to earn all I get—and a little more. Does that explain my persistence and my intrusions?"

Dorothy Dale gave him a quizzical look.

"Well—partly," she opined, adding swiftly, "but even that frankness of yours is very, very good, and of course I ought to be equally candid. I'm supposed to be a very wealthy girl. Maybe I am. But, aside from an annuity, I haven't a penny. Poor Mr. Marshall used to say to my father, who 'failed,' as they say, that there must be property undisclosed somewhere. And he was forever wading through old records, when I was too young to understand what he was doing."

Hank Thomas gave a whistle. "Why, that—"

"Yes," said Dorothy sadly, "that might explain what he came up to the house to talk over with Mr. Fitch. But, I didn't know that until early this morning—when Noble Howard told me the rest of the story Mr. Fitch had told him."

"It hooks up," said Hank with conviction. "Poor Marshall was starting for pa-

pers in his raincoat when he was shot—ah! Myers was looking for a real paper in his portfolio, at the inquest. I see, now. Rebecca Whos-it, the late mayor's stenographer, was also on hand. She told Myers that Marshall had taken some sort of paper up there and Myers couldn't find it among the dead man's effects.

"Well, I'll be double—excuse me, Miss Dale. Now suppose we go back to dine. Then I'll phone the forenoon lookout man on the *Times*, and see what he knows about this jail-break and whatever else has been happening in Downington since you and I eloped. Are you game?"

"Is that a challenge?" Dorothy turned a provocative face up to his own, her eyes danced, and, in full view of nine envious male visages draping the hotel steps, she tucked her arm underneath his own, and pirouetted into the bucolic dining room.

The old negro waiter giggled behind his napkin. Often, in the old days, the elopers had slid out of Downington, and waited for the train here.

"This is turning out to be a lovely day," said Dorothy, demurely. "Now, as soon as you find out how Claude fared, I shall be supremely happy. For Noble Howard generally knows what he's doing—and my frankness has miles and miles to go with you yet."

Hank felt giddy again, when he entered the booth.

Within it, he hunched up and clamped the receiver to his ear.

He was gone for what seemed to Dorothy to be an age.

The time seemed longer to him, although his patient ear drum was immediately vibrating with tumultuous throbs of fresh facts so utterly beyond conjecture.

CHAPTER XIII.

DREAMS.

"I DON'T know about the jail-break," said the chap speaking, "but, Hank, here is plenty of other red hot stuff." "Shoot it, Tommy."

"The *Express* is already out with a third-flash extra. From this and the other two

it seems that Claude Fitch has been released from custody, after a horrible row up at the jail, in which Myers, personally, participated; and during which Myers referred to a copy of the *Times*, denouncing your first account of the inquest, and, by implication, it seems, charging you with conspiring to defeat the ends of justice."

"Insert long waving line in your thoughts to indicate my uproarious cheers," drawled Hank. "Keep firing, Tommy. The chief directed the policy of my story—after I wrote it."

"Yep. I know. Myers now claims that he realized all along that Fitch was absolutely guiltless. He claims that he only permitted him to be incarcerated to delude and trap the real murderer. By the way, it seems that Howard was trying to have some alienists examine Fitch; Fitch kicked up a row and declared that he wasn't crazy; and then in came Myers, and said he believed, implicitly, Fitch's story to Howard the other day; and when Howard asked how he knew it, Myers admitted planting diagraphs in the cell before Fitch got there; and then there was a big shimmy all around, and Howard threatened to have Myers disbarred, claiming that he violated the law prohibiting disclosures of confidences between attorney and client; and Myers told him to 'go the limit'; that the law only prevented the attorney from disclosing what his client told him, and that he had merely 'overheard' the conversation, which he already knew to be true in his own mind—all that—"

"Sure. Alibi, when he switched from Liszt to fox-trot. More?"

"Barrels. Myers pulled a trump by giving the sheriff Fitch's discharge, then and there—and as he did so, in through the mob comes one Pancake Hearn, who butts one of the useless alienists in the stomach and goes out—"

"That part I saw and I chased them," said Hank wearily. "Back to the mob scene, please, where Myers refuses his imperial diadem."

"Well, when the clouds cleared, Myers stood pat, and slammed out. The sheriff was already outside, shooting and being shot, waving his bloody fingers and read-

ing the riot act. Mordaunt is in the hospital, unconscious. But that was only the curtain raiser. Act one opens with a box in the third extra edition of the *Express*—listen.

The assistant district attorney, when asked by a reporter for the *Express* for details of further developments in the murder of Mayor Marshall, admitted that he had issued a warrant for the real murderer's apprehension in the name of John or Jane Doe, and added: "Not another word. There has been altogether too much maudlin publicity in this case already." Asked if the suspect was a man or a woman, he said: "I have nothing to add."

"Any more?" tremoloed Hank Thomas.

"The *Express* in its latest lead, tells how a detective from Myers's office has just gone into that room, with Mrs. Cora Meredith in tow, and carrying a bundle. From the end of the bundle appears a gleam of silk and what seems to be the end of an umbrella that Miss Dorothy Dale claimed was missing, when she testified at the inquest. 'It is strongly intimated that the umbrella was found in her room and in her trunk. Well, Hank, what do you think?'"

"I think Pancake Hearn and his pal, Goose-eye, that covered his crush out of jail to-day, are two gentlemen entitled to the degrees of D.D. and Ph.D., for their noble conduct," drawled Hank.

He hurried back to the dining room where Dorothy's restiveness was growing, despite the delicately conveyed intimation of the aged colored waiter: "I nebber yit seen two nice young folks ketched-up wif, if dey done looked sharp and kept trabblin'."

Hank sat down and looked across at Dorothy.

"Mere words fail me," said he, when the waiter scuffed out of hearing to bring on the delayed meal, "but if I had that goggle-eyed sob sister who sat next to me at the inquest, I'd get him to transpose my thoughts into language meet for your ears. It is a glorious day in the sense that Claude is as free as the gentleman who so kindly aided in our involuntary elopement. He is discharged. Mr. Myers has switched from his original theme, and is now engaged in extemporizing a new melody, entitled, the

'Death-March of the Real Malefactors,' if you get what I mean. With this short prelude, let us now eat, drink and be merry, after which we will discuss our impromptu honeymoon to—to Maine!"

Dorothy Dale's face was transfigured at mention of Hank's home State. And in that super-gleam, as Hank divined, was something more profound than the mere justification of her fantastic hope and prophecy of the day before.

Her impulsive hand-clasp across the table, and her warm fingers, latent with the miracle that was part of her birthright, clasped down on his own as she said:

"If that's so about Claude, let's forget the rest of the horrid nightmare."

"With all my heart!" gulped Hank. "Say, do you know, all this *is* a nightmare—these criminals, officials, and even my, headlines are all froth of unreality—for the real business of life is living. There's a lot of things that I want to tell you—but they'll keep. Besides, I may want to tell some of them to men and never tell them to you. That topic, at present, is taboo! We're eloping. Not a bad idea, eh?"

"I quite understand," said she gently, and then, to the dismay of the man across from her, Miss Dale began to cry softly.

"Oh, I must tell you," she sobbed. "I really must. I knew that Claude couldn't be guilty. I knew it, because—"

"Won't it keep?" asked Hank somberly.

"No-no! It won't. I've been placed in such a false position—and so has he. Why, do you know, a whole year ago we motored with Mrs. Meredith up to a little town on the Maine coast—"

Hank nodded. "I knew it all the time," said he, "for that was where I first saw you and the same limousine I chased this morning. There aren't fifty cars of that make in this country."

She grew wide-eyed.

"Oh! But you only know part of it—even Mrs. Meredith—"

The waiter, by reëntering, saved Hank the rest of it for the time being.

When that well-meaning old darky had again discreetly shuffled out of earshot, they ate and smiled and "made believe." At the meal's end Hank remarked:

"Mr. Fitch was married up there, wasn't he?"

She leaned forward, an angelic smile over her lips. Her next words sent a thrill through Hank Thomas like that the sob sisters had predicted for Claude Cutler Fitch, but he didn't die for more than a minute. Then he resurrected, and astonished the old darky by declaring:

"Here's five dollars, old timer. You know."

"Yassah, yassah! Thank you, kindly, gemmen and lady. May your married lives be long and happy, suh!"

Hank groaned and got up.

"Let's go out to the train platform," said he, "but wait a minute!"

He scurried for the proprietor.

"You know how it is when folks elope, don't you? Sometimes they have to get away in a hurry. Well, that was we and we're wingin', yet. This was the fastest elopement you ever saw! And I just discovered that I'm shy on cash. Now, here's my motorcycle." He flashed his credentials. He showed the receipted bill for the repairs.

"Kin you git along with fifty?" asked the hotel man.

"Ample, old timer. I'll give you that fifty when we get back and soak up the usual forgiveness. Now, if any one asks about us, why, *you* saw *us* when the train for Downington pulled in. After that, you didn't."

"My eyesight ain't what it usta be," drooled the old timer, "but, boy, she's a seraph from the sky!"

"You oughta be arrested for libel," glumly returned Hank. "They lost the model for the seraphs when that little girl came down to earth."

Dorothy clung to his arm as they waited for the train.

"Now, we're still eloping," said Hank, "for reasons that I will disclose later on. At present, I'm going to talk about Maine. You'll elope alone. I'm going to get on the train with you. I'm going to drop off the other side. Then I'm going to get on the train back to Downington, and see what kind of music Mr. Myers is at present rehearsing. Since you know the Maine town

already, you needn't tell me its name; and I can swear that you didn't give me the name of your destination."

"You're not going?" asked Dorothy. "Why, won't they suspect the ruse?"

"I'm not going, but when Mrs. Fitch sends word I'm coming. They need me at the office, bad. Pay cash fare—and, as our Afro-American well-wisher said: 'Keep trabblin',' until you get there."

He took off his hat and raised her hand gently to his lips. Her own were still as spotless as at birth, and the facetious reporter was grinning in a most diabolical fashion and waving his hat, when the Bar Harbor Limited on the Maine Line tore toward the small remnant of the State boundary, after he dropped off.

He went to the *Times* office at once on his arrival at Downingtown.

The chief met him and stopped short.

"Where is Dorothy Dale?"

"Am I my Pancake's keeper?" flashed Hank. "He carried her off, didn't he? Well, I'm back to work. Ran out of funds chasing goose-eyed bandits. My expense account will make you quiver worse than this blow-off you think has us all lashed to the mast.

"Excuse me, I'm busy. Got to talk to Claude Cutler Fitch. Changed my mind. Claude ain't here. Important biz., elsewhere. I got him out of jail—Myers ran true to form—and Myers will be running rings around the *Express* office before morning. I'll write you the nicest little story you ever printed, after the district attorney takes me before the grand jury, now in session."

He walked out of the office, still grinning.

His chief sat down in the waste-basket. "Poor Hank," said he, "the strain we put on him is too much. His brain was full of this case. I wouldn't let him write what he knew, and it all soured."

Six process servers sprang from six separate and concealed spots as Hank threaded his way from the *Times* building to the street.

They clustered around until he was actually inside the door and facing Mr. Myers. Then they went away.

"Well, Mr. Thomas," severely began the official, "I suppose you know the jig is up."

"It's always up, when it isn't down, and when it isn't going up and down," said Hank demurely. "Do you want me to dance a jig? I feel like it. Pull in your horns, or I'll have to plaster them with two-dollar bills to fend myself from mortal harm. In a word, get hep."

"What do you mean? Please go a little slower and be more connected, Mr. Thomas. Really, you gentlemen of the press bewilder me—your spontaneity—and all that," purred the prosecutor.

"Tell the poor boob on the other end of your dictagraph wire I suffer with him," said Hank gravely. "I know what it is to suffer. I began studying headstones at an early age and only broke the pernicious habit to-day. Turn to the statute relating to man and wife and ask me how you can ask me any questions regarding a lady that was once on a time, we'll say, *mée* Dorothy Dale?"

"Aha! So that's the way the wind blows, is it?"

"If your metaphor runs dry, send for James Montgomery Hardy. I stand upon my statutory rights. You can indict and be damned. You can draw your own inferences. I'm going to stand pat until ten o'clock to-morrow morning.

"Then I'm coming in, if you play fair, with enough evidence for you to hang your reputation up and give it a new bloodhound tinge all over. I'll play fair, all the way. So I'll tell a badly-deluded public in to-morrow's *Times* just what your case is—and, meanwhile, the man who really fits it isn't named 'Jane Doe,' and is where he can't get away."

"Sounds reasonable," said Myers craftily. "Have you got all the facts?"

"I'll leave that to you, after you read the morning paper. Shall we say ten o'clock?"

"Really, Mr. Thomas, I wish you'd play fair with me now. It isn't quite right for you to defy the authority of the whole commonwealth so deliberately, is it?"

"The vital link of evidence will be in my hands to-morrow morning. It is docu-

mentary. You couldn't find it in your port folio. I shall get it to-night. If you play fair, remember. If you don't—well, that's your bloodhound reputation—not mine. Meanwhile, to show you I am playing fair, suppose you call up Mr. Bertrand Vail at his New York address, which you'll find in the phone book, and tell him who you are, and that you've been chatting with me. Tell him to please come up, on the first train in the morning, with a certain detailed analysis he made at my request. Don't ask him what it is or anything. Just use my name—and he'll come. You will need him to follow me into the grand jury room."

Myers glowered.

"You told me yesterday," he began beligerently, "that all your testimony before the grand jury could be summed up in one word—conjecture. You tell me to-night that you can hand me—"

"A lemon," cut in Hank coldly, "if you like lemonade. And by that I stand or fall. What I told you was true. Conjecture since became reality. To hook it up into legal evidence I need only one link. On that link your real case against the murderer of Marshall stands or falls. I guess you know from which side your reputation gets its name, don't you? I'm no reputation-buster. I'm a bread-and-butter boy, who, now that he has made up his mind to assume the responsibilities of a family—"

"You know, of course, that I can hold you overnight in jail as an important but recalcitrant witness? And then, if you don't talk, I can have you committed indefinitely, for contempt of court?"

Hank lighted a stogy and gazed over at the baffled prosecutor with a glance that Claude Cutler Fitch would have envied, had he seen it.

Mr. Fitch, unfortunately, was not there to see it. He was speeding Maineward on the Bar Harbor Limited—with a ferocious joy gnawing at his heart; and, sitting opposite him, in a berth whose green tint framed her high color, was a golden girl with violet eyes.

Hank's smile was not feigned. He had glimpsed Mr. Fitch on the same through train, as he waved good-by to Dorothy Dale, and his fiendish smile was bred of

what Myers would think, if he knew the humiliating truth as to 'Jane Doe's' whereabouts.

It deepened and deepened, until his gaunt features seemed etched with the most powerful corrosive that human thought can supply, as he also reflected that Dorothy had no inkling whatever of the menace which Myers was ready to wield—and, which he was powerless to invoke because Hank had outguessed him from the moment Tommy had read the story by James Montgomery Hardy in the *Express* extra.

Disdain lent Hank Thomas a ducal air, which even Fitch could never achieve. The curious thing was that Hank had no idea how he looked. He was no longer even thinking of Myers.

He was back in Maine among "just folks."

Public thinking might move in a vicious circle and ignore "just folks," but, just now, Hank ignored everything else. All of this prosecutor's contemptible puerility fell away. Hank was looking at the vanished Dorothy Dale, with a rapt look on her face holding an infant in her arms to add a last ineffable touch to the exquisite heritage of her youth and beauty.

Then and there Hank suspended the concealed dictagraph stenographer over an abyss of official horror by falling sound asleep and snoring lustily.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DUKE HIMSELF.

TEN o'clock came in the *Times* office. Hank Thomas had not returned. The chief fretted.

"Wonder if Myers took umbrage at his attitude? Call him up, Joe, and ask him if he knows where Hank Thomas is, and why he is there if he is not footloose."

Joe got no replies to repeated telephoning.

Ten thirty arrived. Hank Thomas was still among the missing. Joe called the jail. Mrs. Avery said there had been no new prisoners admitted and the sheriff had not returned with the posse. She thought the district attorney was in communication with the sheriff, for Mr. Butts had called

up from the Junction, about four o'clock, and when the district attorney phoned to the jail for news, she had told him where Sheriff Butts was when he phoned in.

Joe thereupon phoned the Junction hotel.

The proprietor readily recognized Hank's description. He even added to it that the gentleman had been accompanied by a girl, and had "borried fifty dollars from me, and left a motorcycle as security."

The sheriff had been there, but wasn't looking for Hank. He was after "two desprit men, one of whom had bruk jail." He had since left, after the posse had eaten up all the food on hand.

Joe told the chief the meager details.

The chief grinned. "He's a fox," said he. "Planted the gal to fool Myers, and then came back. Well, I wonder—"

He ceased to wonder. A volley of shots from somewhere downstairs sounded in the empty corridors of the *Times* building. Oaths, yells, imprecations, howls, groans—a veritable inferno—seemed to have broken loose.

Joe looked at the chief.

"We'll go down together," said the man wearing the *Times* crown. "Mebbe Hank has met the district attorney, face to face."

They were disappointed.

It was merely Sergeant Timothy O'Brien, clutching an individual whom he recognized, immediately, as a "push-carter." Only, Goose-eye, having foregone the peddling of rheumy bananas to rejoin his pal, Pancake Hearn, and the two of them, having slept the sleep of security in the furniture van, had made the fatal error of emulating the pitcher that goes too often to the well.

Pancake, his sinewy hand yet clutching the "little old man" which was relied upon to drag off a safe door, was not yet entirely "cooked," but on his way to his last earthly oven.

Acting Captain Overton and the two other officers present, learning that Joe was a shorthand man as well as a notary, hurriedly took Pancake's antemortem statement in the office of the late Mayor Ordway Marshall, whose safe they were violating, when the alarm beneath the doormat trapped them.

"All I know," said Pancake, "is that I was hired to do dis job. I come to town to pull it off before they cooked his nibs. I was in jail when dat come off. I—got my pay—to-night—it's in me kick. We backtracked in the van and laid up with the old Portugee dat wanted all the papers in this box—"

"Mordaunt?" almost screamed Overton, as Pancake's eyelids twitched.

He grinned, and bowed his assent—with the same gesture greeting the Invisible One who led him out of the lure of to-morrow's headlines.

Goose-eye confirmed the statement.

They locked up the latter in Mr. Fitch's cell with Mrs. Avery's aid, and hurried down to the lower portion of Downington. The "old Portugee," who insisted that his son "speak respectfully to those in authority" was gone.

It was a year before he was located abroad, and then he cheated justice by a sudden demise.

The chief found a messenger boy perched on his desk on his return to the city room, waving a fat envelope in Hank Thomas's well-known typewriting.

He tore it open, frantically.

The aftermath of the mayor's murder was boiling again, for he read:

DEAR CHIEF:

I will be in the arms of the well-known Mr. Morpheus, alias the Sand-Man, when you get this. Dead for sleep. Battled verbally with Myers. Such a vindictive legal gentleman I never saw. I went to sleep on his hands.

Then only did he lay hands on me. In sheer self-defense, I defended myself.

Mr. Myers, somehow, got one eye in the way. I don't know just how it happened. He fell over his dictagraph wire, and thus ruptured the connection with his concealed stenographer.

That brought the stenographer out of his concealment. Not knowing that I was fed up temporarily this misguided youth manifested braggadocio, with a headpiece. To preserve the dignity of the Commonwealth I was coerced into immuring them both in the same secret cell which the stenographer was guilty of betraying by his untimely emergence.

You will find them both behind the alleged Session Laws for the Year 1800, *et seq.*, but please do not wait another eighteen hundred before pressing the back of that shoddy volume and thus unlocking them, or I fear that

Mr. Myers's optic will not permit him to personally escort me before the grand jury, at ten o'clock to-morrow.

Here are a few facts. They may aid you in my slumber:

Fact No. 1—Claude Cutler Fitch was secretly married to a girl in Maine, about a year ago.

Fact No. 2—Mr. Fitch, being married, had no cause to incur the implied odium of the inquest.

Fact No. 3—The night of the mayor's demise I learned from Acting Captain Overton that there was "trouble" at Mr. Fitch's house after O'Brien had already gone.

Fact No. 4—I went up there. There was a light in the garage. I went into the garage. No one was there. I roamed over the place. In the chauffeur's room, upstairs, was a picture marked, "From your loving sweetheart, Rebecca." I did not disturb this.

Fact No. 5—Another picture of a girl in bathing costume, was by the first. This picture I borrowed. I thought then I remembered seeing the same girl in a Maine coast town. I sent this to the city. It was Miss Dale.

Fact No. 6—At this time Miss Dale's missing gift umbrella was sitting in the corner. I saw the nameplate on the handle. Mr. Myers will show you the ingenious way it was fitted in the ferrule to receive and discharge a bullet of thirty-two caliber. He may even have a surmise concerning it. I have one.

Fact No. 7—I went to the house. Callahan, the cop, and I had words. I left, ostensibly to go to the office. I returned and hid in the garage. The chauffeur came back after a long wait. He hid something in an old tire shoe hanging on the wall. When he had gone I looked at it. It was a hypo-needle and syringe. With it is a fluid. I am no chemist. My penchant is stogies.

Fact No. 8—I picked up a stub of a cigar—the cigar Mr. Fitch forgot he was smoking and tossed out of the door as he came down from his den to meet the mayor. I mailed this to Mr. Bertrand Vail, whose address you will find in the phone book. He phoned me yesterday—he is a celebrated chemist, by the way—that it was loaded with a powerful Oriental narcotic. Get him on the wire and get name. It escapes me.

Fact No. 9—Analysis of the vial I saw Simon Mordaunt conceal in tire, with hypo-needle and syringe will probably show this is identical with contents of cigar.

Fact No. 10—This drugged cigar accounts for Mr. Fitch's odd behavior when O'Brien came to house.

Fact No. 11—It also accounts for Mr. Fitch's subsequent illness.

Fact No. 12—It also accounts for Mr. Avery's somnolence at the jail, earlier to-day,

when, as I am informed, Mr. Avery's keys were stolen by Pancake, who got out of the upper story in this way, and created a hullabaloo in the midst of Mr. Howard's well-meant efforts to prove his client subject to delusions by several eminent alienists. You know what happened there. Mr. Fitch sent for his cigars and probably gave Avery one. Pancake Hearn probably knows.

Fact No. 13—Simon Mordaunt murdered Mayor Marshall. I was sure of this all along, from the moment he mentioned "repairing timing gears" at the inquest. Mordaunt hadn't touched the gears. He had been cleaning spark plugs or maybe just pretending to do that. He rigged the device in Miss Dale's stolen umbrella; he fired the shot. Mordaunt was playing "sweetheart" to Rebecca Lowenthal, the mayor's secretary; he heard Miss Dale and Marshall in conversation, when Miss Dale took him into the department store to get packages; he heard and saw the mayor talking with Mr. Fitch the night of the killing. He laid for Marshall, dodging up and down stairs, avoiding Mrs. Meredith, who found him *after* the murder in the pantry drinking lemonade. Having access to the pantry, he had access to the whole house.

Fact No. 14—The motive was this: See inclosed ninety-nine-year lease from Eliphalet Benton, Dorothy Dale's great-grandfather, to Jonathan Cutler, Mr. Fitch's grandfather. It conveys the tract of land on which the Fitch Mills stand, and expires in three months from date, unless superseded, as likely, by a subsequent deed. Marshall, looking out for Dorothy Dale, had this paper and others in his raincoat. Mordaunt took only the lease. I don't know what use he intended to make of it. This lease dropped from his pocket to-day when Pancake Hearn knocked him from the box of the Fitch limousine in front of the jail. I saw it fall, saw the wind whisk it away. I followed Pancake and just retrieved the lease on a wire fence over the brink of the hill a few minutes before sending this last to you.

In confidence: Miss Dale intimated to me to-day that Mr. Fitch concealed his marriage out of regard for his aunt, who wanted him to marry a girl Mrs. Meredith "had her heart set on." I name no names. Miss Dorothy Dale and Mr. Fitch to-night took the train to Maine, where Mr. Fitch was married a year ago. Draw your own inferences, but keep it all very mum.

Yours, as ever,
HANK THOMAS.

Simon Mordaunt never answered to the indictment the grand jury found against him the following day, following the eccentric reporter's appearance before that body.

Fate had decreed that Pancake Hearn's blow should send the misguided chauffeur to the hospital with a fractured skull, from which he never recovered consciousness.

Mr. Myers was on hand. The *Times* reporter who invaded his office and located the "Session Laws of 1800," and thus effected his release, also lugged in homely remedies for his injured eye. That newspaper was also chary of official dignity, in all six editions next day. The story was a classic.

Mr. Myers, henceforth, as a bloodhound was a very vegetarian animal in examining Mr. Thomas, who was crisp, instead of loquacious, and only droll after he left the grand-jury room.

Then Hank Thomas faded out.

His chief bemoaned his absence. Finally, one day, he got a note in Hank's chirography, saying he had "run across Mr. Fitch in Maine, and Miss Dale and Mr. Fitch would be back in Downington" on a certain date.

Publication of this announcement caused Mr. James Montgomery Hardy to dress in full regalia to meet the train.

"Oh, they both belong," said he, "and it is only fitting that on their return from their formal bridal tour, recognition should be accorded them by the press and their friends."

Mr. Hardy had the recognition wrapped up in an ascot tie, pumps that glittered, and a bouquet of flowers.

He launched himself back toward the parlor car as the train drew in. Mr. Fitch, looking remarkably well and smiling as of old, was first greeted.

Behind him, in a traveling gown whose simplicity seemed only to heighten her indescribable loveliness, tripped the golden

girl. Mr. Hardy bent almost double in spite of his pudginess.

As he straightened up, he glared.

Hank Thomas, who had so cruelly humiliated him, was also getting off. Mr. Hardy "cut him dead."

"Mr. Hardy," said Claude Cutler Fitch, "surely you know Mr. Thomas. He's coming back to the *Times*."

"I have met the gentleman," said Mr. Hardy, in as envenomed accents as the occasion permitted, before he turned to convey his congratulations to the others.

"May I not bestow this small floral token as an earnest of my individual happiness at seeing you both back?" bubbled Mr. Hardy. "It is truly a great boon to see you again, particularly under such happy auspices. Mrs. Fitch is positively radiant!"

Dorothy, her face in the flowers, blushed and smiled.

"Oh, you have it all upside down," said she. "Mr. Fitch has been married more than a year to Mr. Thomas's sister, with whom he eloped. I was only the maid of honor at their wedding. This is *my* husband!"

She slipped her arm through that of the human clotheshorse, whose super-ducal grin of high disdain was positively fiendish.

"Can you imagine him an uncle?" smiled Dorothy. "Well, it's the most wonderful child in the world—it weighs eleven pounds, already. Henry"—she lingered over the name with an ineffable cadence—"hated to leave it to come back to go on the paper again, and so did I. But, Mr. Hardy, we'll let you help pick out a cradle. Its mother will come down next week in Mr. Fitch's private car, and with him, of course. Henry can't get away from the paper—and I can't get away from Henry!"

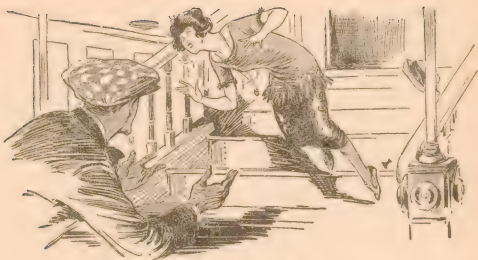
THE END



VINGO'S LADY SERPENT

By LORING BRENT

Another of this writer's clever stories of Florida, dealing with characters in humble circumstances who live little more than a stone's throw from the millionaire belt that makes of this long, narrow State the winter playground for the fashionable folk of almost all the other States. "Vingo's Lady Serpent" will be our Complete Novelette next week and contains a vamp that outvies them all.



Soft Money

By FRED MACISAAC

Author of "The Four Goliaths," "Nothing But Money," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

RODERICK MCGARRY, twenty-five, Oklahoma farmer, unexpectedly falls heir to a huge fortune. He has had a college education, working out his tuition, and now with a ragged, six-foot frame and an eager, intelligent mind he intends to travel a bit. He encounters Howard Campbell, a former classmate, who is more dreamer than loafer, but quite enough of both. Howard wishes himself on McGarry as a secretary, cleverly balks the attempt of a designing girl to marry Rod, and away the two young men rush for Europe. Passengers on the steamship *Durania* include Mrs. John K. Thomas and her beautiful daughter, Gertrude, from near Boston, and very exclusive. As the ship steams past Bedloe's Island, McGarry remarks aloud at sight of the noble statue: "Liberty is a grand old lady, isn't she?" He discovers that a lovely girl is his only auditor, and she snubs him unmercifully as a masher. His next shock is to see aboard a man he suspects of stealing two thousand two hundred dollars from him. McGarry and Campbell have agreed, meanwhile, to pretend that Campbell is the rich man and McGarry is the secretary.

CHAPTER IX (Continued).

THE MAN FROM ALBANY.

ROD MCGARRY followed Howard Campbell with his eyes as he crossed the room and saw a look of pleased surprise on the stranger's face. He arose, offered his hand, Howard took it, and they sat down together. The little man ordered drinks.

So casual was the stranger that Rod felt almost convinced that he had no guilty

knowledge of the loss of the contents of his pocketbook. Howard evidently called his attention to Rod, for he waved to him to come over.

Rod joined them rather reluctantly.

"This is a pleasure, indeed," said the little man heartily. "Your friend told me you were crossing on the *Durania*, but I did not expect to go at the time and it had since slipped my mind."

"You must have decided to sail very suddenly."

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 11.

"I got off the train at Albany and found a telegram informing me my sister was ill in London. I booked on the first boat and this happened to be the one. I'm alone on board. Glad of company."

"Then your two friends are not with you," said Howard.

"Oh, no. I don't know them well. Just train acquaintances, you understand."

"But you all got off at Albany. Are they Albany men?"

"Search me. One of them said he lived in New York. I suppose they had business to attend to. In fact, I didn't see either of them when I got off that morning. I was half asleep anyway."

"Well, we've got to go to lunch," said Rod. "I suppose that bugle is calling us."

"That's first sitting. I'm on the second; are you?"

"We haven't reserved places," replied Rod. "We'd better go do it."

"It's all arranged," Howard said with a wave of his hand. "Miss Norman is getting us at her table."

"Then we had better find which sitting she has chosen."

Howard emptied his glass and rose reluctantly. Higginson nodded to them and remarked: "See you later."

"What do you think?" Rod asked Howard.

"Innocent as a child unborn. No crook could possibly have greeted me the way he did."

"I don't know. Did they seem like train acquaintances to you?"

"They were together when I met them in the club car, but they might just have got acquainted."

"It's funny, his being on this ship."

"Pure coincidence."

"How much money did you let those fellows think you had while you were losing to them at bridge?"

"I didn't say."

"You intimated millions, didn't you."

"I suppose I talked pretty big," Howard admitted, reddening at the recollection.

"Well I have a notion that we are the reason he is on the Durania. If he thinks you have millions he wants to cultivate you and get more than twenty-two hundred.

There is something about that man I don't like. Don't know what it is, but I don't trust him. And after all he is one of three who might have taken our money."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Let him cultivate you. Talk more millions. I'll slip you some extra money to play cards with him, and see if he tries to get you to play for large sums. I have a hunch that we may get back what we lost."

"For a hick from Oklahoma, you are quite a schemer. You must have read a lot of detective stories. I think this poor guy is all right and had nothing to do with your twenty-two hundred. But the idea of being slipped some extra coin listens good, and I'll play the game your way."

They reached the dining saloon, found no places had been reserved for them and were allotted a table for two in the far corner of the dining room at the second sitting.

"This has its bad and good points," commented Howard. "It prevents us from immediately meeting some beautiful girls who might be sitting at a larger table. On the other hand it keeps freaks and bores from making our acquaintance, if by chance we drew them."

"I don't see anybody like that."

"All persons over the age of thirty-five are either bores or freaks or both," declared Howard with the presumption of youth.

"I've met some right nice people who were middle aged or even old."

"On a trip like this we have no time for anybody that isn't young and beautiful and amusing."

Rod laughed at him. "Somehow I feel as though I was about fifty years older and a hundred years wiser than you. You are like a bad child I am taking around at great trouble and expense. Right after lunch I want you to come down to the cabin and copy fifty pages out of my Bible."

"For Heaven's sake what for?" Howard protested in alarm.

"To earn part of your salary and to satisfy my Scotch conscience that I am not paying something for nothing."

"You are beginning to acquire a sort of inverted sense of humor and it's going to

get you into serious trouble. I'm liable to resign from my job."

"Do you call that trouble?"

"Without me you would be a ship without a rudder, a watch without works, a horse without a rider. If I hadn't joined you back in Kansas City you would already be so bored with yourself you'd be going to work or something horrible like that. Remember how I saved you from being married to Arabella."

"Poor Arabella! I hope she'll be happy somehow. Maybe I'll go back and marry her yet!"

"You are more likely to marry the peach who thought you were taking a liberty with her instead of the statue."

In this way they amused themselves until the second sitting bugle summoned them into the dining saloon.

"Here's a riddle for you," said Howard as he picked up the menu.

"What's the difference between this bill of fare and the one in any Oklahoma hotel?"

"Lots I suppose."

"This one has a hundred dishes on it. So has the other. But this one means what it says and all you can get at the hotel is ham and eggs."

"There's something in that. Let's see it."

The first meal on an ocean liner is exciting, because all the diners are looking over all the other diners, wondering whom they are going to meet, and how they will like them if they meet them. Howard's head spun around as if it were on springs. Rod was thrilled a bit himself as at the assemblage.

"There are an awful lot of people here who look like plain folks, just small town and country people on a holiday," he said.

"Yes, but some of them are very different. Look at that girl at the captain's table. Isn't she ravishing?"

Rod looked. He saw the back of a graceful head crowned by a wealth of beautiful black hair. It was all he needed to recognize her.

"I see her," he said dryly. "That is the young lady who spurned me as we passed the Statue of Liberty."

"So that's the one. Good Heavens, she is lovely! Why crowned heads would be glad to talk to her. No wonder she couldn't waste time on you. She's liable to be hard, even for me, to meet. But I'm going to try. There's Mary Norman over there. I'm glad we didn't get at her table. That girl friend of hers is a frump."

CHAPTER X.

ROD GETS HIMSELF DISLIKED.

BY the middle of the afternoon the company on the Durania had settled itself comfortably for the voyage. The weather was warm and the sea was calm. The big ship slipped through the water without the lightest movement and a complete absence of vibration. The deck chairs were ranged on the sunny side of the three decks in two long lines.

Women passengers wrapped rugs around their limbs, and leaned back among their pillows in perfect ease. A number of men and young women were already walking around the decks, counting the laps and gradually turning them into miles. It was not only good exercise, but a tour of inspection. Howard and Rod were among the promenaders.

Pretty soon Mary Norman spied them and hailed them over to meet Mrs. and Miss Dupoy. The Thomases were not visible. The Dupoys turned out to be agreeable if plain sort of folks. Rod was quickly at home with them, which was fortunate, because Howard had drawn Mary from her chair and taken her for a walk.

The hours passed pleasantly. Stewards came with trays containing tea, buttered bread and cakes. It was Rod's first experience with afternoon tea, and, being a healthy young man, he consumed vast numbers of little sandwiches and cakes, but declined the tea because it contained lemon instead of sugar and cream.

Frances Dupoy laughed at him.

"That shows you are a Western plebeian. Nobody in the East dreams of taking tea with cream and sugar any more. And if you eat all those cakes you won't have any appetite for dinner."

"Leave that to me," grinned Rod. "I'll be there when the bugle blows."

"You are an ill-assorted pair, you and Mr. Campbell," she continued. "He is peppy and seems to be set on springs. You are slow and easy going. How do you keep up with him?"

"I don't try. I drift along in the rear."

"Mary Norman has always been a quiet serious sort of girl, but she thinks he is wonderful. She was telling me about him before you came along. He keeps her laughing all the time."

"Howard is very witty and he is always at the bat trying to knock home runs. No wonder he is popular."

Miss Dupoy frowned. "I don't know that he will last. He strikes me as a very temperamental and rather shallow person. But I'm told he is rich and has made his money all himself. That would seem to indicate otherwise."

Rod was a bit embarrassed. He didn't like to tell this clear eyed, rather plain girl, the truth about Howard because it seemed underhanded, yet he hated to permit him to sail under false colors. He equivocated.

"All he has, he secured himself. I know that his parents were not well to do."

"Then I am undoubtedly mistaken about him. Have you been friends long?"

"I went through college at Kansas City with him. He was the most popular man in his class."

"Are you going to be abroad long?"

"We haven't made any plans. We are going to spend some months in Europe and I hope to see all the interesting places in England, France, Italy and Germany."

"That's quite a contract. We go over every summer, but stop only in Paris and London, and perhaps one of the summer resorts like Deauville or Ostend."

"I think we had better go down and dress for dinner," suggested Mrs. Dupoy. "Ask your young friend to excuse you, Frances."

They departed, and Rod sought his own deck chair. It was on the deck above. There were two vacant chairs immediately beside it, which meant nothing to him, of course. But he had been seated for less than two minutes when he saw the girl with

black hair approaching with her mother, and escorted by the deck steward.

He led them to the vacant chairs. Gertrude Thomas rested her eyes upon McGarry, who had seen her approach and immediately fastened his eyes upon a newspaper which he had carried in his pocket.

"These are your chairs, Mrs. Thomas," said the steward. "One of the most desirable locations on the ship."

"They will do very nicely," said Mrs. Thomas.

"Mother," said Gertrude, "I do not wish to sit here."

"Why, my child?"

"I have reasons which I shall explain later. Please change us, steward."

Miss Thomas was a sophisticated young woman. She had read in romances how men on board steamers were wont to bribe the deck steward to place their chairs beside those of attractive girls whom they hoped to meet. This big Westerner had addressed her early in the day and been rebuffed. Nevertheless, he had the insolence to arrange to sit beside her during the voyage.

While she might admire his courage she could not countenance it. His cue was to arise and ask the steward to change his chair, apologizing humbly to the affronted young lady.

But Rod missed his cue. The fact that his chair was in this location was pure chance. He had never heard of scheming for a certain place in the line of seats. In his innocence he did not know what to do, and he remained silent, buried in his newspaper.

He knew, of course, why the lovely, cruel girl wished her chair removed. He winced at her words. She was twisting the knife around in the wound to his sensitiveness. But he did not dream that she considered him guilty of a second outrage.

Gertrude waited expectantly for a few seconds, and motioned to the steward to take away the chairs. A score of persons sitting about watched the little drama and suspected something of its significance.

As she walked away Gertrude was saying to herself, "Why, the ignorant, ill-bred boor! If he had a vestige of decency he

would have offered to have his own chair moved. Then we could have declined, and that would have shown him acquainted with the usages of polite society. It's too bad because he has rather a nice face."

The steward offered two very inferior places against which Mrs. Thomas protested. Gertrude explained.

"The man has been annoying you? Why, it's an outrage. I shall report him to the captain immediately."

"Oh, mother, please don't do any such thing. I can manage my affairs. But we simply couldn't sit beside him."

"Most assuredly not. Very well steward, these places will be satisfactory. And it's so late we might as well dress for dinner. There is no time to sit down." Accordingly, they retired to their stateroom which was one of the show quarters of the Durania.

Rod's feelings can be easily imagined. Naturally a bit shy, abnormally sensitive, lacking utterly in the form of conceit which makes men assert themselves with women, he was thrown into a fit of despondency, mingled with bitter resentment against the girl who had humiliated him.

If there were only some way he could pay this girl back in her own kind, show her as much scorn and contempt as she evidenced for him! He wanted to take his wealth and flaunt it in her face, but he had sense enough to realize that it would make little difference to her. She was obviously reared in the purple.

To lie helpless and supine under her continued slights; it was terrible! The voyage to which he had looked forward with high hopes was already a nightmare. The thought that he was locked up on a vessel with this girl, compelled to see her every now and then, perhaps have her heap further humiliation upon him, was almost unbearable. He felt like jumping overboard. Perhaps she would be sorry if she knew she had driven him to suicide.

He was reading a paper upon which the type was a blur. At this moment Campbell dashed up and knocked his hat down over his eyes. Rod sprang to his feet with clenched fist. He glared at Howard with a look which terrified the merry secretary. He almost struck him.

"What's the matter, old sobersides?" quavered his friend.

"Oh, you go to hell."

He thrust him aside and stalked off to his cabin. Howard looked after him in blank amazement.

"I wonder what's biting him?" he queried the empty air.

Dinner that night was an unpleasant affair. Nearly every man in the dining room, including Howard, wore dinner jackets. Rod had not purchased one because it had not occurred to either him or Howard that they would dress on board the ship. Rod had one brown, and one gray suit, both conspicuous in an array of bare shoulders and white shirt fronts. He was completely out of sorts and the appearance of the dining saloon made him feel out of place.

"I've got money enough to own evening clothes. You claim to know everything about such things. Why didn't you tip me off?" he demanded.

"I'm sorry, old man. I always carry mine when I travel, but I have never been on board ship, and I didn't happen to think they dressed up for grand opera just to get their dinners."

"You are a hell of a secretary."

"I'd let you wear mine only it won't fit you." He was secretly glad of that. Had Howard been caught in such a situation without proper clothes he would have died of shame. With Rod it was only an annoying incident following the affair of the afternoon.

This hurt him so that he did not mention it to Campbell. But after dinner he declared that he intended to turn in. Nothing would induce him to face the company in the social halls and smokeroom with the possibility of meeting that girl face to face.

The worst of it was that the more he raged at her treatment of him, the more he condemned her cruel and causeless behavior, the more he was attracted by her beauty and obvious charm. He could not put her out of his mind. He lay in his berth, staring at the roof of the cabin, seeing continually the look of loathing and contempt for himself written upon the most beautiful features in the world.

Howard, during this time, was mingling

in the big social hall with a bevy of delightful young people. The orchestra was playing in the far corner of the room. The passengers filled every seat, overflowed into the hallways and upon the decks near the entrance. He found Mary Norman, looking lovely without her bow spectacles, her pale blond hair prettily dressed, and wearing a shimmering white evening gown. Seated beside her was Gertrude Thomas, equally delightful, but as different from Mary as midnight from morning. She wore a red costume, a small string of pearls about her white neck which so gracefully poised her small and beautifully shaped head with its crown of blue black hair.

Gertrude had been telling her of her second experience with the boor from the West.

"Imagine his boldness in having his chair placed beside ours after the way I squelched him the first time he spoke to me. And think of his bad manners in freezing us out of our places. I never supposed we would have to move. I supposed he would go."

"Bad manners or innocence," said Mary. "Supposing it was just an accident that his chair was beside yours."

"Pooh! Such coincidences don't occur. And you know as well as I do that men are always arranging such accidents, as you call them."

"I'd like to see this bold person," Mary laughed. "What does he look like?"

"Why, he sits in the dining room with this man who is coming this way."

Mary looked up and saw Howard Campbell approaching.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed. "It must be Mr. McGarry. I'm sure you are wrong about him, Gertrude. He's the most harmless and nicest boy imaginable. Just a big, good-natured farmer. How do you do, Mr. Campbell! Gertrude, this is Mr. Howard Campbell from the West. Miss Gertrude Thomas of Boston."

Howard gazed at Miss Thomas with deep appreciation. He recognized her, of course. Rod had told him at lunch that she was the girl who had snubbed him.

Gertrude smiled at him. When she smiled, she disclosed two rows of shining white little teeth, her lips curled delight-

fully, and two beautiful dimples put in an appearance, one in each cheek.

"Mary has been talking of you, Mr. Campbell. I am pleased to meet you."

Conventional words, but as they were spoken in her clear rich voice they made his blood race. Some women have one sort of charm, others another, but Gertrude had everything.

"Where is Mr. McGarry?" asked Mary, a trifle maliciously, because she could not fail to notice that Howard was a bit overwhelmed by her beautiful friend.

"He said he was going to turn in. He didn't bring any evening clothes, and the display to-night knocked him for a goal."

"Oh, how unfortunate," said Mary. "But it isn't necessary to dress on a steamer. I hope he won't disappear every night."

"The old boy will get over it all right." He was answering Mary, but he could not keep his eyes off Gertrude. "You ought to know Rod, Miss Thomas. He's the salt of the earth."

"I do not believe I care to know him if he is the man I think he is, the one who sits with you at table."

"That's Rod. Nothing wrong with him at all."

"Gertrude has had a little misunderstanding in connection with your friend," explained Mary. "He spoke to her without an introduction and this afternoon she found he had the next deck chair to hers. So she moved her chair."

"Well, you wouldn't blame him for that."

"She thinks he was trying to force an acquaintance and arranged with the steward to place his chair in that position."

"Please don't discuss it, Mary," pleaded Gertrude, her eyes snapping with annoyance.

"I'm trying to clear the matter up, dear."

"I can tell you this, Miss Thomas. Rod didn't get his chair near yours on purpose, for the excellent reason that he didn't get the chairs at all. I did. And as I had never seen you or knew your name at the time, it's kind of certain that I didn't make such arrangements."

Gertrude flushed to her ears. His words

carried conviction. She had assumed a man was anxious to make her acquaintance. It appeared that he was the victim of an accident. She had pointedly and unmistakably insulted him. What must he think of her?

And as she remembered their original encounter, his remark was a boyish enthusiasm which might have been addressed to any one. Supposing he had not been taken with her appearance at all and had not been trying to make her acquaintance. She had been vain enough to think so, and now it appears that he had not wished to follow it up. She had made a fuss out of the merest trifle.

Gertrude had been brought up to think pretty well of herself. She had been trained to guard against familiarity from strangers. But in this case she seemed to have been a conceited and presumptuous little idiot. Probably the man was laughing at her vanity in assuming that he was anxious to know her.

Mary read what was passing through her mind as if her forehead had been glass.

"It looks to me as though you had been unfair to Mr. McGarry," she said quietly.

"In the matter of the deck chair, it seems that I was," admitted Gertrude. "But it was a natural error on my part because he had spoken to me early in the voyage."

"All he said was that the statue of Liberty was a fine girl," flashed Howard.

Gertrude rose with considerable hauteur.

"Then you have been discussing me between you," she said with heat.

"I didn't know it was you. He told me that he was excited about sailing and made some remark to a person who stood near him, and it happened to be a girl who turned around and demolished him."

"He considered it amusing, I presume."

"I should say not. He was sorer than a pup. Said he wouldn't speak to that girl again if they were the last couple in the world."

"Mr. Campbell, you shouldn't repeat such silly words," said Mary.

"I am very glad he did. It is the first time I have been the subject of discussion between men. I trust it will be the last. Good night, Mary."

Gertrude retired in good order. Mary gave a vexed smile.

"My, but she's difficult. Imagine her making all that fuss about nothing. And now she's thoroughly ashamed of herself and she wouldn't admit it for worlds."

"She's some peach," murmured Howard, following the retreating figure with a devouring look.

"You men make me tired. A pretty face can't make up for a disposition like a crab apple."

"There isn't anything the matter with her except she's a swell headed little kid. And she'll get over that before she's very much older. Imagine her thinking that poor old Rod laid a plot to get his deck chair beside hers. Even if he knew enough to think of it, he wouldn't do it. When a tiger bites you once, you keep away from that tiger. Let's you and I go for a walk on deck. There's a moon and everything."

Mary threw a wrap over her bare shoulders and they made an exit.

Gertrude was sitting alone in her stateroom. Her mother was listening to the music in the social hall. Her cheeks burned with indignation and shame. What a monumental fool she had made of herself, and what a double-dyed idiot she had been to confide in Mary. The pair were undoubtedly laughing at her now, and pretty soon McGarry would be told the story and he would laugh. Or would he?

Somehow she did not think he would. There had been a hurt look in his eyes each time, a look which had driven her to be more intolerable. She wanted to hurt him. Why?

He had said that he would never speak to her again as long as he lived, and this was before she had come upon him beside her deck chair. If he felt so indignant then, how did he feel now when she had gratuitously insulted him.

She would have liked to apologize for the deck chair incident, now that she knew that it was entirely a mistake. But how could she apologize to a man who wouldn't meet her?

One of the chief characteristics of the female sex is that they always want what they can't have. Under ordinary circum-

stances it is doubtful if Rod would have interested Gertrude. He was not of her world. He was not sufficiently attractive to draw her. He lacked the conversational gifts which enabled Campbell to make his way. They might have crossed the ocean on the same ship without her meeting him or evincing the slightest interest in him.

But here was a man who had set up a barrier between himself and a spoiled and pampered young beauty. He wouldn't speak to her if they were the last people in the world. At least she must make him change his mind about this. He must be forced to meet her and become interested in her. Then she could forget him.

And so the first night of the voyage of the *Durania*, two young persons from far corners of the United States, who had never met until that day, who had not exchanged a word, but who had come into active conflict nevertheless, lay in their respective staterooms each thinking about the other and trying to hate each other.

If Rod had known that the proud beauty who had treated him so badly was wasting an evening thinking about him, that she felt humiliated in discovering that he had not been pursuing her with his attentions, he probably would have improved in his mind.

And had she known that her action had hurt and humiliated Rod and not amused him; that despite his brave words he was irresistibly attracted to her, and that most of his despondence was due to his belief that he never would get to know and be friends with her, she would have smiled and gone to sleep.

Curiously enough his cabin was directly below hers. They were within eight feet of each other during the whole time.

CHAPTER XI.

ROD TURNS MISOGYNIST.

HOWARD came down to the stateroom about ten o'clock. Mary, being unchaperoned on board was compelled to be more circumspect than the girls who had mothers or aunts, and she abandoned the full moon and her amusing com-

panion on the stroke of four bells. He found Rod lying in his berth undressed but not asleep.

"Well, old man, while you were mooning down here I was meeting your proud little friend. Her name is Gertrude Thomas. She comes from Boston, which explains her iciness. I fixed things for you pretty well."

"There is nothing to fix. I hate the sight of the girl."

"You were pretty clammy about the deck chair incident."

"It was none of your business."

"Don't be so ugly. I explained it."

"There was nothing to explain."

"Oh, wasn't there! Do you know what she thought?"

"I'm not interested."

"Oh, yes you are. She supposed that you had bribed the steward to place your chair alongside of hers."

Rod swung his legs out of his berth and stood upright on the floor in his pyjamas.

"Say that again."

Howard obliged.

"Well, of all the things in the world! What kind of a fellow does she think I am?" He was white with fury.

Howard blundered along. "I told her that the thing was impossible. I secured the deck chairs and as I had never seen her nor knew her name I couldn't have done the trick. And, of course, you knew nothing about it."

"Why in hell didn't you mind your own business? What right have you got to be apologizing for me and fixing things for me? What do I care what that vain little snob thinks? I don't want to be acquainted with her; I hope I never set eyes on her again. Who does she think she is that I should be following her about, letting her wipe her feet on me and treat me like a hunk of mud?"

"You keep away from her, do you hear, and don't you dare to bring me near her. As far as I am concerned she doesn't exist and if she were to come to me with tears in her eyes pleading for forgiveness I'd turn my back on her and walk away."

"Bully for you. That's the spirit. Down with the blooming Yankees, male, female and their young."

"You shut your face or I'll break it for you."

Howard saw that his friend was burning up, and had sense enough to subside. He undressed and climbed into his bunk.

"All right, old socks. I won't try to bridge the gap. But if she speaks to me can I answer her, or must I cut her dead?"

"I don't mean to be rough with you," apologized Rod. "You certainly are not to blame, but I feel very bitterly about this girl, and I wish the darn voyage was over. It's spoiled for me. I've got a reputation on this ship as a chaser and I'll be afraid to look any woman in the eye."

"Oh, Miss Thomas isn't the kind who'll talk. Only Mary Norman and myself know anything about it, and we'll certainly keep quiet. Try to forget it. There are lots of girls who'll be glad to play around with you."

"I'm off the whole tribe for life."

"Well, let's go to sleep. Maybe the ship will sink before morning and you won't have any more worries."

Rod put out the light, clambered back into the upper berth and there was silence in the stateroom. Pretty soon it was broken by snores from Howard. Rod stayed awake for hours.

Howard Campbell is not the hero of this story, neither is he the double-dy. villain. It's been necessary to record some mean things that he has done and some generous ones. He was just a thoroughly selfish, volatile and shallow-souled young fellow with a lot of brains that he had never put to work, an easy conscience and a desire to be as comfortable as possible with the least effort.

He had attached himself to Rod McGarry because he saw him suddenly wealthy, a bit bewildered and very much alone. He figured that Rod's riches should result profitably for Howard. He had hoped to obtain control of the purse strings, to find Rod careless of expenditure and exceedingly easy to manage.

While Howard would not have stolen money from Rod in the exact sense, he would have had no scruples in padding expense bills, making deals with merchants and tradesmen to pay him commissions and

otherwise fatten himself at the expense of his employer. But in Rod he had encountered a native shrewdness, a Scotch caution and a refusal to take him seriously, which had baffled him.

It was generous of Rod to engage him as a secretary when he had no need for such an officer. It was decent of him to take Howard off to Europe as a companion, and it was very obliging to permit Howard to appear to be the moneyed person of the pair. Howard admitted these things to himself and he was as grateful as he was capable of being. But it was exasperating not to be allowed to improve the first real opportunity to fix himself that had arrived during his life.

Beneath his mask of insouciance, Howard Campbell felt keenly his complete lack of accomplishment. Without the will to grind at labor he wanted to enjoy its fruits. From the hour he knew that he was going abroad with McGarry, he had been wondering if he might not meet a rich girl who would respond to his bag of attractions and enable him to make an alliance which would remove him from the ranks of toilers.

During the first day of the voyage he had met three girls. Mary Norman was an agreeable companion, but she was as poor as himself; studying to be a teacher. That let her out.

Miss Potter-Dunlap was rich as mud. Her mother was good-natured, rather common; impressed already by his surface qualities. He might do well in that direction. But darn it, the girl wasn't pretty and Howard was unreasonable enough to wish for beauty as well as wealth in exchange for the gifts which he could not bring himself.

There remained Gertrude Thomas. There was a girl—an exquisite darling of a girl, high bred, cultured, rare and fine, daughter of an old Boston family. Her father was a wealthy manufacturer of shoes; so he had learned from Mary. She appealed to him tremendously. Could he make an equal impression on her?

He knew well enough that Rod was hit hard in that direction. The very vehemence by which he declared that he hated the girl proved otherwise. The two af-

fronts from an ordinary sort of young woman might have ruffled the young farmer, but not have sent him brooding in his cabin.

Rod was personable enough if one knew him, he was a college man as well as a farmer and he was wealthy enough to please even such parents as Gertrude appeared to own. Given a fair start he might put Howard out of the running. In fact all that was necessary to put Howard out of the running was to reveal that he was a paid secretary masquerading as the employer.

However, it had been Rod who proposed the existing arrangement, and there was no chance whatever that he would overturn it. And in view of the present attitude of Gertrude and Rod, it should be an easy matter to prevent their becoming acquainted. Evidently he had nothing to fear from Rod. And, having looked the young men on board over with great care, he saw few who were likely to interfere with what he decided would be a serious courtship of the Boston girl.

It is a serious fact how few attractive young men travel on the Atlantic. There are girls galore, old men, middle aged men, a legion of old ladies, but few youths between twenty and thirty. Young men of that age have not yet earned money enough to afford such luxuries or they are not entrenched enough in their professions to spare the time.

Howard was foolish to discount the attraction that men of thirty-five and forty have for young women; being a boy himself he considered such men as completely superannuated.

He did not consider that he was disloyal to Rod in going after the only girl his employer seemed to fancy; it was much more important to him to win a rich wife than it could be to a man with a million. Why, he had just arranged the escape of Rod from the clutches of a girl who was determined to marry him and Rod had said he would not marry for years if he could avoid it.

"Every man for himself," thought Howard Campbell. "And me for the heiress."

All these thoughts had been running through his head as he arose from his berth

next morning and went for his tub. He luxuriated in the warm salt water, stretching himself full length in the long, wide tub and enjoying the sensation of perfect health and complete self satisfaction.

The lovely weather, the blue water that he saw through the porthole, the charm of the voyage; these things caused Rod to resume his good spirits in the morning. That disagreeable girl must not spoil the trip for him; surely the vessel was big enough so that he need not see her again, and he would take care to give her no further opportunity to assume that he was trying to make an impression upon her.

He hummed a tune while he was taking his bath, a cold one, not the warm affair in which Howard was ruminating. He was healthy and strong and twenty-five and rich and on his way to see the world. What more could a man desire on this earth?

In the best of spirits he went in to breakfast and he surprised Howard by making a few witticisms as they sat at table, mostly at the expense of curious looking passengers who were visible about the dining room.

"What's the program for to-day?" he demanded. "How do people amuse themselves on board a ship?"

"Oh, I suppose we lounge around. They have certain games, shuffle board, deck tennis, quoits and such things if you are energetic. And you can always promenade. I imagine we can play bridge or poker in the smokeroom."

"What are you going to do?"

"Well, I told Mary I would try to fix things with the purser to get her and her friends taken through the ship, the engine room and everything."

"That includes that black-haired little devil, doesn't it?"

"I think she will be along."

"Then count me out. I'm going to occupy myself during the rest of this trip by keeping out of her way."

"Oh, come now, old man. I'm sure I can straighten out the trouble between you without difficulty."

"You mind your own business. I am not sending ambassadors to that girl to beg the privilege of her acquaintance. As far as I am concerned I don't know she exists."

Howard smiled, a bit craftily. "I think you are foolish, but have it your own way."

They finished breakfast and went up on deck. The beauty of the ship and the sea, the sense of exquisiteness which prevailed on the decks thrilled both of them. It was a joy to be afloat on such a ship upon such an ocean. They made a few circuits of the deck and upon their third lap saw Mary Norman and Gertrude Thomas turn the corner of the deck house at the after end.

"Exit Roderick McGarry," declared Rod, and slipped through the saloon entrance. Howard stepped to the rail and waited the girls. They were both charming in their shipboard costumes. Mary wore a white sweater and a black tam, Gertrude had a blue walking suit and a little blue turban. Their eyes were sparkling with joy of the morning and the voyage.

"Was that Mr. McGarry whose back I saw going through the saloon entrance?" demanded Mary.

Howard grinned. "Himself, no less."

"Why the hasty exit?" she demanded meanly.

"I offered to present him to Miss Thomas."

Gertrude reddened with annoyance.

"After what has happened, I hope you would not be rude enough to present him to me without first asking my permission."

"Of course not. And he wouldn't let me if I tried. He doesn't want to meet you any more than you want to meet him."

"I am truly sorry about the deck chair incident," said Gertrude, whose eyes were snapping with more anger than contrition. "But I consider him an objectionable person and I should be very angry with either of you if you tried to force me to meet him."

"Don't go and tell him that," said Mary, looking shrewdly at Howard. "I don't think you are being very nice repeating to Gertrude things Mr. McGarry may have said in haste, and carrying back to him such stupid remarks as she has just made."

"Who? Me?" demanded Howard in pained surprise. "I'm no tale bearer. I had no intention of creating ill feeling. I'm just trying to explain why Rod beat it when you two girls came in sight. As a matter

of fact, he doesn't want anything to do with women. He has just had an unpleasant experience with a girl out home and he's off the sex."

Not being well acquainted with female psychology he did not realize that this statement caused an active interest in Rod to spring up in both their hearts. A woman hater, a misogynist—why, nothing is so interesting to a young girl as a man who has eliminated her sex from his scheme of things.

Mary laughed shortly. "If that is so, Gertrude, you must have been doubly mistaken."

Gertrude flushed violently. "I don't care to walk with you," she declared, "and if you have any liking for me please don't refer to this uncouth secretary person again in my hearing."

She passed into the wide hallway and started to descend the broad stairs leading to the deck below. The first flight stopped at a wide landing half way to the lower deck, where one turned and descended to the deck by a short flight at either hand.

Gertrude was retreating with great dignity and had placed her little foot upon the first step down when her high French heel broke completely off, causing her to lose her balance. She clutched at the rail, missed it and was precipitated head first down the stairs.

It happened that Rod McGarry was ascending and reached the landing in time to see a young woman plunging toward him. He stooped and caught her deftly in his arms before her head had time to come in contact with the steps. Even upside down he recognized her face, and he set her on her feet, bowed curtly and continued upward two steps at a time. He was out of the upper hall and on deck before she had time to rally her confused senses.

Of all people in the world, it had to be he who had saved her from a serious accident. Ordinary courtesy demanded that she thank him, but so little time was given her that she could not find words before he disappeared.

She stood on the landing on one foot, holding to the hand rail and ruefully re-

garding her broken shoe. She had not suffered a single bruise, he had saved her from the bump which was awaiting her. And so little consideration had he for a lady in distress that he had not even asked her if she were injured.

In view of his two previous experiences she could not blame him for refusing to address her. She should have said something to give him his chance. But a few seconds before she had called him an "uncouth secretary person." Then she was hurled into his arms of all people among four hundred passengers. There were plenty in sight now. In a few seconds she was surrounded by men and women inquiring anxiously whether she were hurt. One man retrieved the heel of her shoe. The peg which fastened the heel had broken clean off. She answered their questions perfunctorily.

Why was it that she was encountering this man continually and so strangely? In this case there was no question but that it was a coincidence. He certainly had not been lurking about in wait for her. As he ascended the lower flight of steps he could not have seen her at the top of the main staircase. Fate, or something, was placing him in her path. And as yet they had not exchanged a word.

What an unpleasant person he must think her, to have hurried away after such a clever rescue, without waiting for her expressions of gratitude. Probably he thought she would accuse him for a third time of pursuing her. Oh, it was most exasperating! And she had to thank him. And how could she thank a person who evidently intended to keep his distance from her.

With the aid of a young woman she hobbled to her cabin and changed her shoes. She could not help thinking how strong his arms had felt. She weighed one hundred and twenty pounds, and she was coming like a shot from a catapult. Yet he had caught her and sustained the shock without a quiver. With one motion he had picked her up and set her on her feet. And then he had fled.

Was he interested in her at all, or was it simply a natural feeling of aversion for a vain girl who had misunderstood all his actions? A few days ago she would have said

that the opinion of a crude person from the West would have meant nothing in the world to Miss Gertrude Thomas of Boston. She tried to tell herself so now, but she knew that she did care. She did not want him to think that she was a shallow, conceited, empty-headed idiot.

Mr. Campbell had said Rod hated the sight of her, or something like that. Her resentment flamed against Campbell. What a small, shallow, catty person he was to repeat statements made by his friend or his secretary. At least she knew Campbell and she would pay him off for his contribution to the situation.

Poor Howard who was trying to clear decks for himself had only heightened her interest in McGarry.

CHAPTER XII.

ROD GETS HIMSELF ARRESTED.

ROD'S tribulations were not yet over. He was walking the deck with hurried pace, almost blinded with his emotions.

He was afire with the feeling of that girl in his arms. What an exquisite thing she was, and how curious that he should be on hand to save her a bad tumble. His resentment against her was strong as ever. He had rejoiced at the chance to rescue her and leave her without a word.

And yet he wished that he had spoken. It would have been the decent thing, even to a girl who had treated him as she had done, to have made a polite inquiry. Vain as she undoubtedly was, she could not have misinterpreted that.

Now it happened that as Rod paced the deck he passed close to the chair of Mrs. Thomas, and Mrs. Thomas, at that moment, was drinking a cup of bouillon in company with no less a dignitary than Captain Brown who commanded the *Durania*. The skipper was a red-faced martinet of the old school of British seamen. He had been greatly impressed with Mrs. Thomas at dinner the night before and had paused at her chair as he made his morning rounds. They were discussing other ships, the sea and the degeneration of ocean travel.

"The strangest sort of people go to Europe nowadays," said Mrs. Thomas. "Do you see that man there, that big, ugly, burly person who is passing?"

"Yes."

"Well, he had the effrontery to annoy my daughter. Not content with trying to engage her in conversation against her will just after sailing time, he arranged to have his deck chair placed beside hers. And he refused to move when she arrived with me and protested against the arrangements. We were compelled to have our chairs placed elsewhere."

Captain Brown grew purple with indignation.

"That sort of thing cannot go on upon my ship," he declaimed. "I will not have lady passengers annoyed by such people. You leave it to me to see that you are freed from further objectionable attentions from that quarter."

"What are you going to do?" demanded Mrs. Thomas, rather frightened at the result of her chatter.

"Oh, I won't have him hanged, though I ought to. But I am in supreme command both of passengers and crew. I'll put a stop to mashers. Excuse me for a few moments."

With ponderous steps he followed the unconscious McGarry. Rod had turned at the forward rail and was retracing his steps. Captain Brown stepped in front of him.

"Young man, I want a few words with you," he declared in his best dictatorial manner.

Rod snapped out of his reverie. He saw a stout man in uniform in front of him, but being unfamiliar with the insignia of the sea he did not know whether he was being addressed by the cabin boy or the captain. And he did not like the tone.

"Who in hell are you?" he demanded.

The captain almost exploded with offended dignity.

"I am the captain of this ship."

"Is that so? Well, what do you want with me?"

"What in the devil do you mean by annoying ladies on board this ship?"

The first thing that flashed into Rod's mind was that Miss Thomas had construed

his rescue of her into a third attempt to force his acquaintance with her and was insane enough to report him to the captain. And the idea infuriated him to such an extent that he lost his head.

"What I do on this ship is none of your damn business," he retorted. "And don't you call me a masher or I'll—"

"Well, what will you do?"

"I'll do something. I've been pestered enough by an idiot of a girl who thinks every man who passes her is trying to flirt with her."

"What's your name?"

"Go to the devil and find out."

The captain signaled to the deck steward who was hovering about. He came running.

"This man is under arrest," he said. "Confine him to his cabin for the rest of the voyage. If he resists, call the sergeant at arms and put handcuffs on him."

It dawned on Rod that he had got himself into a frightful muddle.

"You can't arrest me," he protested. "I'm a first cabin passenger on this ship and I paid for my passage."

"As captain of this vessel I am in supreme command. You have insulted a woman passenger and you have defied my authority. I could have you shot if I wished and any court would clear me. Now will you go quietly to your cabin and remain there or shall I have you carried by force and put a guard over you?"

"If you have such authority, of course, I shall submit. If there is any law that will reach you for this outrage, be sure I'll take advantage of it."

"Go as far as you like," said the captain. "Now get off the deck. Your meals will be sent to you. If after a few days' confinement you change your attitude and guarantee to behave yourself, I may decide to release you."

Rod turned on his heel and went below. The condition of his mind can be imagined. The deck steward followed him at a few paces.

And as he passed through the corridor leading to the main staircase he encountered Gertrude Thomas.

Gertrude had put on new shoes and new resolutions. She had made up her mind

that she would walk right up to Mr. McGarry, thank him for his rescue and apologize for the incident of the deck chair. The steward following close behind him meant nothing to her. She stepped in front of him and began in a hesitating manner:

"Mr.—Mr. McGarry."

She met a look in which disgust, contempt, dislike and scorn were so evident that she shrank aside. He passed her without turning his head.

She watched him descend the stairs with mingled emotions in which anger and wounded pride were upmost. Then she tossed her head, shrugged her shoulders and passed out on deck. After all her conscience was clear, she had wished to apologize and the man had rebuffed her in the most insolent manner. Evidently he hated her intensely, and in that case there was nothing more to be done. She told herself that she hated him.

There had been a few persons on deck near enough to overhear the conversation between Rod and the captain. They were numerous enough to spread it all over the ship in a few moments. Only Mrs. Thomas, serene in her unapproachableness, did not hear it and as Gertrude immediately joined her, the rumor escaped her also.

Howard Campbell and Mary Norman heard it within half an hour as they sat in the veranda café outside the smoke room. Three or four women were excitedly discussing it. They mentioned Rod by name, but did not know who the girl was who had been insulted.

Mary's eyes flashed.

"Why, this is the most abominable, outrageous thing I ever heard in my life! The poor, innocent creature! Imagine arresting him and locking him in his stateroom. I never would have believed that Gertrude could be capable of such a thing. What on earth sent her to the captain with a tale she had already admitted to be based on a misapprehension?"

"It's damnable," declared Howard. "But what can be done about it? Nobody will believe a man against a girl."

"I'll go to the captain. I'll lead her there by the ear. If she doesn't straighten things out I'll never speak to her as long

as I live. Of all the hopeless snobs she is the worst I ever knew. And yet I can't believe it. She was the sweetest thing imaginable in college.

"Maybe Rod committed some offense we don't know anything about."

"Of course he didn't? How could he? Why, it's not half an hour ago that he left us and Gertrude was talking with us after that. You go see the captain right away. I'll find her."

With fire in her eye, Mary sped along the deck looking for her friend. She knew the location of the Thomas deck chairs and she spied Gertrude sitting beside her mother. Both were reading.

Breathless she paused in front of them.

"Gertrude, I wouldn't have believed it of you. Of all the cruel, brutal things, that you should treat this man who never did you any harm, in so outrageous a manner!"

It was the wrong approach to the proud and raging young woman whose humiliation was so recent.

"I don't know what you are talking about," she said, "but if you are referring to the McGarry person, I refuse to discuss him."

"Then consider our friendship at an end. I never want to see or speak to you again."

Gertrude winced and her pride helped her.

"Use your own judgment, my dear," she said coldly, and dropped her eyes on her book.

Mrs. Thomas was regarding Mary with cold disapproval, but she said nothing at all. Mary hesitated a second then turned and walked slowly away.

The captain who had been summoned to his quarters immediately after his arrest of Rod, was encountered by Howard a few moments later descending the ladder from the bridge deck.

"May I have the honor of a few words with you, captain," he began tactfully.

The skipper smiled affably. "Certainly, sir. What can I do for you?"

"My name is Howard Campbell. I am informed that you have placed a Mr. McGarry under arrest and confined him to his stateroom."

"That is so."

"Well, may I ask the charge? You see I am traveling with him. In fact I am his—he is my secretary."

"Oh, indeed. Well, he has been annoying ladies on board and when I called him to one side to warn him to behave himself he became so insulting that I was compelled to have him punished. We must preserve discipline on board."

"Certainly, sir. He would not have insulted you, but he is suffering from a raging toothache that makes him wild. I am sure he will apologize to you. And as for insulting ladies, don't you think that may be an exaggeration?"

"Not at all, I had it from an unimpeachable source."

"McGarry is a countryman, captain. I don't think he meant to insult any lady. But out where he comes from everybody speaks to everybody else, and he might have said something in a perfectly innocent manner that a lady from Boston, for example, would think was an attempt to pick her up. You know most people think the conventions are off on board ship."

The captain pondered. "Perhaps I was a bit hasty. You probably need the man's services, too, if he is your secretary. Now I tell you what I'll do. You have him apologize to me and to the lady in question and I'll restore him the privileges of the ship so long as he behaves himself."

"Why, that is wonderful of you, captain. I've always heard that British seamen were the most generous and fair-minded in the world, and now I know it. I thank you a thousand times."

"Not at all, sir," said the skipper, beaming all over. "It's been a pleasure to meet you, sir. You are a type of American that does your country credit. Come up to my room some evening and we'll have a drink and a chat."

They shook hands and separated, mutually pleased. Howard might have his faults, but he knew how to approach people.

Elated at having settled matters so satisfactorily and so easily, he hastened to the stateroom to break the good news to Rod. He found his friend stretched full length in his bunk, his head buried in his arms.

"It's all right, old socks," he proclaimed.

"Little Howard Fix-it has been on the job again. I've secured your pardon and your liberty, and I'm waiting for the applause."

Rod looked at him somberly. "How did you find out about it?" he asked.

"Why, it's all over the ship. Mary and I overheard some people talking about it."

"Then what's the use of getting me out of here. I'm still imprisoned on this ship. Everybody who sees me will say 'There's the man who was locked up for insulting women.' My God, what has that girl done to me?"

"A damn dirty trick, if you ask me. Mary Norman was furious. She went after her to bawl her out while I tackled the captain. You should have seen me smooth down the fur on the old boy. He's invited me to his cabin for a drink. All you have to do is apologize to him for the way you talked and apologize to Miss Thomas."

"Thank you very much. I prefer to remain in jail," said Rod quietly.

"Aw, come on, that's no way to talk."

"The captain insulted and humiliated me without excuse. Why, he should apologize to me. And Miss Thomas is not entitled to any excuses from me. I never did anything to her. On the contrary I saved her from breaking her neck as she was falling down the stairs near the social hall about ten minutes before she had me reported to the captain."

"You don't mean it! I told Mary something must have happened after she left us on deck. Say, old man, you didn't squeeze her too tight when you caught her? Some of these Boston girls don't want their lives saved unless it's done with perfect respect for the conventions."

"I simply set her on her feet and walked away. I didn't pause to ask whether she was hurt. What's the matter with that girl? She's actually persecuting me."

"She's sure got one terrible disposition," sighed Howard. Lovely and rich as Gertrude was, she began to repel the merry mercenary. "Imagine getting you pinched for rescuing her. I suppose she considered it a third flirtation. Still what's the harm in writing her a little note expressing regrets and sending another to the old puffball of a skipper. Kid 'em along, say I."

"If I get out of here," said Rod, "I might accidentally meet that girl and I might say or do something that would get me electrocuted. I'd rather stay in this room during the rest of the voyage than even look at her once. And when we get to Plymouth I stay on board until you notify me that she is off the ship. Now get out of here; it's better to be alone than listening to your misplaced humor. Though I thank you for going to the captain about me."

"You can't put me out of my stateroom."

"It's a prison cell now, and they ought to find you a better room. Go make a kick."

"Well, if you feel like that," grumbled Howard on his way out.

CHAPTER XIII.

GERTRUDE WRITES A LETTER.

THE cause of it all was very much bored. Her mother's society was always acrid. Her only girl friend had just forsaken her. The Dupoys had been chilled by her mother's glacial greeting of them and kept well away.

Howard Campbell was partly responsible in her opinion for the unpleasant affair with Rod McGarry; he carried tales. She did not know a soul to whom she could talk.

Mr. McGarry had begun to make some sort of appeal to her. After the incident on the stairs, she had thought that a word or two from her, direct to him, would sweep away misunderstanding, and they might become acquainted. He was rather interesting, and looked as if he might have real ideas. But he had rebuffed her so furiously when she met him in the corridor; he so obviously hated the sight of her, that they certainly never could be friends.

True she had given him some cause for indignation, but there was no reason for that dreadful look of scorn which he had cast upon her. Ah, well. What did it matter! What did anything matter? The way Mary Norman acted she might be in love with the fellow. Perhaps she was. She had met him on the train. In that case she ought to be glad that Gertrude was not

acquainted with him. Against her attractions, what chance had Mary? Gertrude's lips parted in a half smile; she knew her own worth.

By and by it was time to eat. The "first sitting" guests were streaming out on deck and the bugle was blowing for the "second sitting."

"Let's go down, mother," she said. "The morning in the sea air has given me an appetite."

"We might as well get it over with," grumbled Mrs. Thomas, lifting herself out of her comfortable nest. "Come along, dear."

Luncheon was half way through before the captain appeared. Gertrude had been watching the distant table where the boys sat, and saw Campbell take his place, but not McGarry.

She felt a bit curious to know why he didn't come to lunch.

And then she found out.

"I had to take stern measures with that young man you pointed out to me, Mrs. Thomas," he said. "I spoke to him and he was so insulting that I put him under arrest and confined him to his cabin."

She nodded her head approvingly.

"I congratulate you upon your firmness," she said. Gertrude had caught a word or two of this conversation, but not its import, as she was sitting at the other side of her mother, and two places from the captain. She leaned forward.

"Did you say you had arrested somebody on board, captain? Who was it? What had he been doing?"

The captain looked surprised. "Why, it was on your account, Miss Thomas. I have had the man who insulted you confined to his stateroom."

The color faded from the girl's face. Her mouth opened and shut as she tried to form words. Her emotions ran riot. She was too well-bred to make a scene in a crowded dining room with half dozen people at the captain's table regarding her curiously. She wanted to scream at the top of her lungs, to beat the captain in his fat chest with both her little fists. But she did not.

"This is terrible," she murmured, swung

around her chair and hastened from the dining room.

"What's the matter with her," the captain grumbled. "I was doing what I thought was best for her."

Mrs. Thomas smiled placidly. "It's her training, my dear captain. That anything should be done which involved her in what she considers a disgraceful affair would naturally discompose her. I had no desire that you should take any measures against the man, because I dislike talk as much as my daughter does."

"It was the way he talked to me when I was rebuking him for his behavior which caused me to confine him," the skipper explained a bit uncomfortably. "But it's all right. His friend, Mr. Campbell, his employer, too, I believe, interceded for him, and all he has to do is apologize to me and to your daughter and I'll let him out. In the meantime try some of this roast beef with Yorkshire pudding, I recommend it highly."

Gertrude had fled to her stateroom while she considered the perfectly awful situation. The young man had saved her from an injury, perhaps from a serious one like a broken limb, and ten minutes afterward he was subjected to the frightful humiliation of arrest for insulting her.

When she had met him in the corridor he was on his way to his cabin. That was why the steward was following him. At that moment she had attempted to thank him for his rescue and he thought she was there to gloat over his situation; undoubtedly that was why he had silenced her with a glare.

Could he believe that she had considered the rescue still another effort on his part to force attentions? Of course, he must believe it because the circumstances were so damning. Oh, what could she do, what could she say, how could she convince him that she had nothing to do with his plight?

It was her mother who had complained to the captain, and she had asked her mother particularly not to do so. Why had she ever paid any attention to the original offense? It was nothing. Mary Norman had undoubtedly met him on the train without an introduction, and nobody would accuse

Mary of not being a nice girl. Why did she have to be such a prig? And when she had found him in the deck chair beside hers, why had she not accepted the situation as the coincidence which she knew, now, that it really was?

Well, it was up to her, now, this minute to go to the young man and force him to listen to her. She would humiliate herself, spare herself nothing, tell him how sorry she was for his trouble due entirely to her, beg for his forgiveness and ask to be friends with him. She wanted to be friends with him. The tears started from her eyes at the thought of what he was suffering through her meanness and her mother's action.

And then her New England inhibitions shut down on her. She could not go to a man's stateroom; it was impossible. Supposing he would not speak to her, supposing he slammed the door in her face. How terrible it would be if she went to him and he got even with her for her treatment of him by ordering her away, perhaps ringing for the steward and saying: "Remove this woman. She forced her way in here."

Ordinarily no man would do such a thing, but he must be furious with rage and resentment against her. She would write him a letter, that was best—and safest.

She seized paper and pen and began. It was the most difficult letter she had ever written:

DEAR MR. MCGARRY:

Please believe I had no hand in your arrest and I feel dreadfully humiliated that my mother should have spoken to the captain about you. Won't you please forgive me? I shall explain to him that it was all a mistake.

I thank you very much for saving me from a bad fall on the stairs, and would have thanked you at the time had you waited. I was a ridiculously conceited person to dream that your deck chair was placed beside mine intentionally, and I behaved in a most ill-bred manner to you at the time.

I would like to have you know that I am not the kind of a person, really, that I must seem to you, and hope you will give me an opportunity to demonstrate it. Please, Mr. McGarry, forgive an unhappy, foolish girl.

She was weeping so hard that tears were streaking her cheeks as she signed this mis-
sive, and she wiped them away with a tiny

lace handkerchief. Then she rang for the steward. She gave him a twenty-five cent piece, and the letter, saying:

"Please make sure that this is delivered immediately to a Mr. McGarry, one of the passengers. I don't know the number of his stateroom."

"I'll find it miss, without any trouble," declared the steward as he pocketed his tip.

As he emerged from the stateroom and headed up the corridor he encountered Mrs. Thomas who had finished lunch and was in search of her daughter. The sharp eye of the mother caught the distinctive script of Gertrude upon the letter in his hand. She stopped him.

"My daughter gave you that letter," she declared.

"Yes, mar'm."

"Give it to me."

He handed it over and she read the address.

"Hum!" she said to herself. "Soft-hearted child. I might have expected this."

Aloud she announced. "I'll take care of this letter. If my daughter asks if you delivered it you may tell her that you gave it to the proper person. Here's something for you."

She handed him a half dollar and he hastened on his way, quite content. Mrs. Thomas tore the letter into small pieces and went to a porthole at the end of a cabin alley and dropped them overboard. She was too honorable to read what Gertrude had written, but not too honorable to intercept a letter. However, her conscience was clear.

Gertrude felt better after she had gotten her confession off her chest. She was quite cheerful when her mother entered and did not rebuke her as bitterly as the lady expected for blabbing to the captain her experiences with McGarry. Mrs. Thomas was very sweet. As Captain Brown left the dining saloon he encountered Howard Campbell.

"Well, young man, has our prisoner repented and sent us his apologies?"

Howard hemmed and hawed before he could make a coherent reply.

"He says he's been so humiliated he

might as well stay there for the rest of the voyage."

"You mean he won't apologize to me and to the young lady?"

"He thinks you treated him unfairly."

"Well, well. I was a bit hasty. Let him apologize to the girl and leave me out of it. How's that?"

"The worst of it is, captain, that he doesn't think he did insult the young lady, and he says he won't apologize for something he hasn't done."

"Indeed. Indeed. Then let him stay where he is. I'm sure we won't miss him."

The captain retreated in a huff.

Howard went into the music room where he found Mrs. Potter-Dunlap and her daughter. He spent an hour making himself agreeable with considerable success.

Mrs. Thomas fussed about her cabin for a while and went on deck. Gertrude made an excuse to remain and in half an hour she rang for the steward a second time.

"Did you deliver that letter?"

"Yes, miss."

"Have you an answer for me?"

"No, miss."

"You mean to say he didn't send me an answer?"

"No, miss, nothing," said the steward with a most uncomfortable manner. Gertrude interpreted this as confusion because he was compelled to disappoint her, and she dismissed him. Then she sat down to think.

So, after she had lowered and degraded and humiliated herself to the extent of writing a letter imploring a man's forgiveness and asking for his acquaintance, he treated her with silent contempt. Perhaps she deserved it, but it didn't seem that a decent human kindly individual such as he appeared to be, could be so cruel. Apparently she had no attraction for him at all. He wasn't interested in her in the least and resented her part in his difficulties as a man resents the presence of a vicious and disease-bearing mosquito.

Never in her short life had Gertrude reached a pitch of self abasement such as she experienced now. She threw herself on her berth and wept. She wept so hard she fell asleep, and dreamed that she and Rod

were cast away on a desert island and he chased her to the other side of the island, and when she came back turned her over to some cannibals who happened to be around, suggesting that they make a hearty meal of her. Just as they were cooking her, she woke up with a shriek. It was nearly dark.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DANCE ON THE DURANIA.

HER mother came in as she was dressing. She had been asleep in her deck chair for several hours and she chided Gertrude for remaining in the state-room upon such a lovely afternoon. They dressed leisurely and chatted cheerfully enough.

"The captain says he is going to arrange a dance to-night, just to start the young folks off right on the voyage. You had better wear that new crimson gown."

"I don't know why I should be interested in the dance. I know nobody on board and I'm not likely to be asked to dance. Besides, after what happened to that young man because he made a casual remark to me, I shall be as popular as an ogre on this voyage."

"Mother, it was a terrible thing for you to do. I found out afterward that his having the next deck chair to us was really a coincidence. Mr. Campbell selected the chairs, and he had not set eyes on either of us."

"Why did you not tell me, then? You said nothing about the deck chair incident after we changed our locations."

"I was ashamed to admit, even to you, that I was such a fool."

"Then you can't blame me for speaking of the matter to the captain. And he will take care that you have partners for the dance."

"I don't see what the difference is between men who are introduced by name by the captain or the purser, and those one meets casually on a ship. The officers do not know anything about these people."

"It's a convention, and it must be observed."

They didn't talk any more, but Gertrude made up her mind she would draw the captain to one side and ask him to release McGarry without any reservations.

"Even if he doesn't think fit to answer my letter, I owe him that much reparation. But, afterward, I hope I never set eyes on him again in my life." That was what she told herself as they went into dinner.

Dinner was an unpleasant ordeal for her. She could not eat and she watched the skipper gorge himself with a good deal of disgust. She was waiting for the moment when she could make her plea without auditors.

When the group at the captain's table passed out of the dining saloon she tugged at his coat sleeve and the commander turned aside with her obligingly.

"Captain, I could not tell you without attracting too much attention at table, but we have been most unjust to Mr. McGarry."

"Indeed."

"Yes, sir, I misinterpreted a polite expression which he made in the most perfunctory way just as the voyage started. I was an idiot. And then when I found him sitting beside us I lost my head and ordered our chairs moved. I found out afterward that his friend ordered the chairs and he did not know anything about their location. It was purely an accident. I know this."

"That throws a different light on the matter."

"And not ten minutes before mother told you this dreadful tale I broke the heel of my shoe, and was falling downstairs when he caught me and saved me from injury. You can imagine the position it places me in to have him under arrest."

"Hum. Well, I sent Mr. Campbell to him to tell him that he need not apologize to me, but that he owed one to you. He sent back word he preferred the solitude of his cabin to mingling with the passengers, and that he intended to remain there. Of course, I shall notify him he is free to come and go as he likes. And I'm very glad that there is no truth in the charges against him. You are a brave little girl to come out and tell me the facts. A lot of women would have let the poor chap rot rather than admit that they were wrong."

"Thank you so much, captain. But isn't there something you can do to show the passengers it was all a mistake? I'm sure they are saying dreadful things about him."

"You can wager on that. During a voyage, where nothing ever happens, these old women will swell any yarn until it has changed its shape. They are probably saying he tried to murder you, by this time."

"It's terrible," she wailed.

"Tell you what I'll do," said the skipper. "I'll give a party in my cabin to about a dozen people and invite him. That will prove that he's vindicated. Will you attend the party?"

She hesitated. Suppose he resented her presence? Suppose he snubbed her openly? Well, it would be her punishment. She nodded.

"We have got to set him right."

"Good girl. The party will be to-morrow night."

Feeling very much relieved, Gertrude sought her mother and they went out on deck where preparations for the dance were under way.

Many colored lights had been screwed into the covering of the shelter deck. Flags were skillfully and tastefully draped around to give the effect of a ballroom. Stewards were waxing the planking and the ship's orchestra was tuning up dolefully at a far corner.

The passengers were grouped around the sides of the improvised ballroom. Comparatively few acquaintances had been made as yet. The women eyed one another suspiciously and scrutinized the evening costumes which were appearing.

The most conspicuous person present was Mrs. Potter-Dunlap who had her plump figure arrayed in a very low cut gown and who had covered her chest with jewels till she looked as though she were suffering from an eruption. The Potter-Dunlap jewels were famous, and there were several pairs of eyes on board who regarded them covetously. Still, they were very unbecoming.

Young girls, heavily chaperoned, perched on the arms of deck chairs and tapped their feet impatiently. Several attractive women

of more mature age were talking and laughing gayly to men. They were seasoned travelers who knew how to make early acquaintances.

"That blond woman over there," said Mrs. Thomas to Gertrude, "I'm sure she's thirty if she's a day and I saw her kissing her husband good-by when the ship sailed. She is alone on board and yet she seems on very good terms with those two men."

"She probably didn't report them to the captain for speaking to her," said Gertrude bitterly.

"Please, darling, forget that unfortunate affair. The captain told you he would arrange it."

"He has. He's giving a very exclusive party in his cabin for Mr. McGarry to-morrow night and we are going."

"We are not going," declared Mrs. Thomas. "The very idea."

"We are going, both of us. We are responsible for the disgrace that came upon him and we are going to show ourselves, to make up for it."

"But my dear child, the man is only a secretary or something."

"Mother, there are times when I wonder at father's patience all these years! What has the young man's social position got to do with the matter?"

"I didn't intend to meet anybody on this voyage," she retorted feebly. "What a terrible thing for a daughter to say to a mother!"

There came a blat and a blah from the orchestra and a fox trot began. One of the saddest things in the world is the orchestra of an English ship endeavoring to play American jazz. They play the notes more or less accurately, but they completely lose the spirit of the music, and their syncopation is something to be deplored.

However, the charm of a dance on board ship caused the passengers to forgive them and the party was on. For several minutes no one had courage to be first on the floor. Then Howard Campbell, resplendent in his Tuxedo, led out Miss Potter-Dunlap, and the ball was open. Three or four couples followed timidly. A fringe of dancing men hung around the outskirts. A half hundred girls hoped for partners. Introduc-

tions might be of the frailest, but under such circumstances they would serve.

The purser began to do his duty. He brought a half dozen men across to the row of girls, mumbled names which he invariably got wrong, and succeeded in augmenting the couples on the floor. Taken by and large, the ball was rather dismal. The Thomases retired early. Gertrude did not dance. Nobody approached her.

When she had said that the men would consider her as an ogre she had not really believed it. But it was quite true! She was the girl who had had a man arrested for speaking to her. She was beautiful, but far too much of a prude to attract the Lotharios of the Durania.

When Captain Brown made up his mind to be generous he acted at once. His many years at sea caused him to know the discomfort in store during a voyage for a young man who started off wrong, and Rod McGarry was certainly in wrong at the start. He deserved some reparation and the skipper decided to give it to him.

So he inquired the number of Rod's stateroom and was presently knocking on the door.

Rod was endeavoring to read by the one electric light in the cabin, and being very thoroughly miserable.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

"The captain of the ship, Captain Brown," replied the skipper.

"Well, I don't want to see Captain Brown. I saw him once; it was enough."

The captain's anger was never far below the surface.

"Open this door, or I'll break it in," he proclaimed.

"Break it open. It doesn't belong to me."

"Well, I'll be damned! See here, young man, you are taking entirely the wrong attitude. I came here in a spirit of conciliation, but one more remark from you and I'll leave you here for the rest of the voyage."

Rod got up and opened the door. He looked grimly at the uniformed official.

"I don't intend to be rude, but I've suffered enough at your hands," he said bitterly.

"I overlook your rudeness because you got what you Americans call a 'raw deal,'" said the skipper with an attempt at joviality. "It seems there was a misunderstanding all around. I came down to tell you myself that I am sorry for my part in it. Shake hands?"

"Well, this is decent of you, captain," said Rod, accepting the olive branch gratefully enough.

"Fine. Now forget all about this arrest business. A very lovely girl interceded for you. You are lucky, young fellow."

"I wish I thought so."

"Yes, sir. And in case anybody on board has gotten a wrong impression of the affair to-day, I'm going to give a party in my cabin to-morrow night to the nicest people on the ship. Only about a dozen of us. And among those who have agreed to attend is Miss Gertrude Thomas. You know who she is."

"Unfortunately, I do. Thank you, captain, for inviting me, but I couldn't attend any affair with that young lady present. I don't want to see her. She'll feel the same way when she knows I am invited."

"But she knows it. She feels an injustice has been done and she wants to come."

"She does? It's not possible. But even if it is, I'm not going to have any fatted calf served to me, because, you see, I'm not a prodigal son. I'll accept my freedom, captain, though I think I'll stay below just the same, but I don't care whether I am vindicated in public or not. The opinion of the passengers, and Miss Thomas in particular, does not interest me."

"Then you are a damned, ungrateful, young pup," declared the skipper whose affability vanished. "It's the first time anybody ever declined an invitation from me."

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. POTTER-DUNLAP IS ROBBED.

IF the little episode of the segregation of a young man for speaking to a girl without an introduction had given the passenger list a subject for animated discussion, they had something really exciting to talk about next day.

It is wonderful the trustfulness of passengers upon an ocean liner. Persons who are most careful about bolts and bars at home, sleep with the doors of their staterooms on the hook. Serene in the impeccability of those who have the price of a first class ticket, they go to their berths in peace.

Remarkable it is that their confidence is so rarely abused. Thefts on board a liner do not often happen, perhaps because the thief is locked up on the ship with the victim, and hiding places are hard to find.

Nevertheless, a thief entered the stateroom of Mrs. Potter-Dunlap while she slept and went away with the marvelous array of jewels which had adorned her at the ball. She had placed them in the safe with the purser upon coming on board, had found the purser's office closed at the end of the dancing party, and, not bothering to send for the ship's official, she carried her gems to her stateroom and locked them in a small hand bag.

In the morning she found a neat slit in the hand bag and a collection of pearls, diamonds, rubies and emeralds which she valued at more than seventy-five thousand dollars, missing. Her squawks had drawn the steward and the stewardess, and, at the first suggestion of robbery, the purser came on winged feet.

Cases of this kind are immediately brought to the attention of the captain of the ship. Captain Brown had hardly finished his breakfast when he was summoned to the suite occupied by the Chicago millionaire, by a haggard purser.

The captain looked not unlike a headquarters detective as he sat in an armchair in Mrs. Potter-Dunlap's drawing-room and listened to her story.

"You heard no sound during the night?" he demanded.

"Certainly not. Neither did my daughter. If we had we would have given an alarm."

"Are you both heavy sleepers?"

"Not particularly."

"Who knew you had the jewels?"

"Everybody on the ship," said Miss Potter-Dunlap. "I asked her not to wear them to that foolish dance."

"Who knew their value? Had you told anybody how much they were worth?"

"I'm not in the habit of mentioning the price of my jewels," she said haughtily. "I presume anybody who knows gems could tell very readily that they were expensive."

"What acquaintances have you made on the ship?"

"Very few. I am careful with whom I associate."

"What men have you and your daughter met?"

Mrs. Potter-Dunlap hesitated. "Why, Mr. Campbell was quite attentive to both my daughter and myself last evening. But I certainly should not suspect him."

"Did he escort you to your stateroom?"

"Why, yes, he did. In fact I invited him to come into the drawing-room, and we had some champagne. It seemed the thing to do after his devoting the evening to us."

"Then Mr. Campbell knew that you had not returned your jewels to the purser's safe last night."

"I suppose so. But, surely, you do not think he took them?"

"Of course not," said the captain. "But by a process of elimination we can get down to the only person who knew that seventy-five thousand dollars' worth of jewels were left unguarded over night. Did the steward or stewardess come in at all last night?"

"The steward brought in a bottle of champagne."

"Make a note of that," said the captain to the purser.

"Do you think I'll get them back, captain?" she wailed.

"It's a certain thing that they are aboard the ship. Nobody has got off since last night. If they are here we'll find them, if we have to search every room on the ship. We have five days in which to recover them. I think you can hope for the best."

He arose, shook hands and departed with his usual dignity. The purser followed.

"Where does this fellow Campbell come from?" the captain demanded, when they were safely in the purser's office.

The purser looked through the passenger list, and then glanced at a card catalogue of information regarding passengers. It is

the custom of steamship companies, when selling tickets, to ask many apparently trivial questions which are carefully recorded and sent aboard the ship. The reason is to provide the ship's officers with certain facts for just such occasions as this one.

"Howard Campbell gives his residence as Kansas City, age as twenty-six, parents John and Helen Campbell, address, 467 Baltimore Avenue."

"He is supposed to be very wealthy and travels with a secretary. Send a radio to the police of Kansas City asking for information regarding him. If they don't O. K. him, we'll go through his effects and give him what the Americans call the third degree. He seems a pleasant, decent chap, but you never can tell."

"What are we going to do if we find he didn't take them?" asked the purser. "We can't search the persons and effects of everybody on board."

"Yes, we can. I had a similar case ten years ago on the Cretia. I called all the passengers together, laid the facts before them, and asked how they felt about submitting to a search. There happened to be a duchess on board who was an awfully decent sort and I told her my dilemma beforehand."

"She arose immediately and asked that the search begin in her cabin and on her person. That settled it; every blessed woman on board rushed forward and pleaded to be searched, and of course the men made no objections."

"And did you find them?"

"No, we didn't, but there was an explanation which developed afterward. The woman had sold her jewels and brought paste imitations on board. She threw them out her cabin window. They were heavily insured and she made a claim to the insurance company. They had to pay, but the detectives of the company afterward located the jewels in New York and proved that she had disposed of them before sailing."

"Her husband hushed the matter up by paying the insurance company back its money. She was a gambler and had enormous bridge debts which she feared to disclose to her husband. Afterward he got a divorce."

"Nothing like this with Mrs. Potter Dunlap, do you think?"

"No, this seems like an actual robbery. You took an inventory of what was lost, of course."

"I have it here," said the purser, displaying a sheet of paper.

"I didn't ask her if her jewels were insured? Did you?"

"Yes, she has fifty thousand dollars' worth of insurance upon them."

"Are there any suspicious persons on board? Anybody hanging around the smokeroom who is known to have a record?"

"The smokeroom stewards have reported nobody. I'll stroll around myself tonight to see if I know any one. These gamblers patronize the de luxe ships. Usually there isn't enough card playing going on here to make it worth their while."

"Keep the matter as quiet as you can. No use in making talk," admonished the captain.

"Trust me, sir," said the purser, opening the door for his superior officer. "I'll get a radio off about young Campbell right away."

When Rod had suggested that Campbell assume the attitude of employer instead of himself, he certainly did not dream that weird complications would arise from an innocent masquerade. He had said that nobody in the East had ever heard of either of them, but he had never considered that the wireless and the telegraph brings East and West together like neighbors.

A wireless was zipping its way through the ether to a big shore station. From that it went over the wires to the agent of the Black Dot Line in Kansas City. The agent called upon the chief of police and that official consulted his records.

"We have no evidence that a Howard Campbell ever did anything wrong in Kansas City. Is he charged with any crime?"

"No," said the agent. "It's merely an inquiry from the captain of the Durania upon which he is a passenger."

"Well, I'm willing to oblige. I'll send a man to the address given here, and have him make some inquiries around town. Come back to-morrow and I may have some information. Will that be time enough?"

"Certainly. If the Durania is beyond the reach of shore stations the message can be relayed to her by other ships. I am greatly obliged."

He sent a message, immediately, to the effect that Campbell was unknown to the police of Kansas City, but that he was being investigated, and the result would be known next day.

The Durania was about twelve hundred miles from New York when this reply was received. The original wireless had been sent at eleven in the morning, and the reply came at four thirty in the afternoon.

People used to take a sea voyage to cut loose from the world. They can be as much in touch with affairs in mid-ocean at the present time as if they were still in the city. And with the telephone radio which is part of the equipment of every first class ship, they can dance to music played in a hotel café a thousand miles away, or listen to a prima donna singing in a concert in London or San Francisco.

Another wireless message came to the Durania during the afternoon of her third day at sea. It was addressed to Mrs. John K. Thomas. It almost killed her. It read:

Thomas Company in receivership. Essential you return by first steamer.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. THOMAS GETS A SHOCK.

FOR more than a year John K. Thomas had been grumbling to his wife about business conditions; his protests against her expenditures had been more and more piteous. He had tried hard to dissuade her from this trip, but she had ignored his objections as she had always done.

Mrs. Thomas had never considered it necessary to acquaint herself with the details of her husband's business. During their twenty-three years of marriage she had always spent what she considered necessary and turned the bills over to him, without any interest in the manner in which they were paid.

He had always taken care of the money

end of the alliance, and she expected that he always would. It never entered her head that the Thomas Company was really in difficulty. It had always been in existence and profitable; it always would be. Meanwhile, she had her position to maintain, her daughter to rear and educate, and a certain idea regarding what were necessities of life which would have surprised about ninety-nine per cent of the world.

She understood perfectly what a receivership meant. It indicated that her husband had failed in business and the courts had taken his company away from him. It meant that he didn't have any more money. Undoubtedly he desired her return so that she could sign away her home and her jewelry for the benefit of a lot of creditors.

She had jewels in the purser's safe worth twelve thousand dollars. Her home with its furnishings would bring thirty or forty thousand. These things were in her name. She didn't think she would give them up.

Mrs. Thomas was an extremely selfish, self-centered woman. She wasted no sorrow upon her husband, who must be crushed and overwhelmed by his disaster, and who was undoubtedly longing for the sympathy of his wife and daughter. Her first impulse was to refuse to return home.

But he had given her only sufficient money for her voyage and immediate expenses in London, promising to cable additional funds before the ship reached Plymouth. She realized that he would not be able to keep this promise, and if she did not wish to be stranded abroad she must do as he said in his wireless, book passage back on the next ship sailing westward.

What would be her condition when she returned; bitter, grinding poverty, undoubtedly. Her husband was the type who would not recover from a failure. She could see him futilely and hopelessly plodding in some insignificant employment which would not keep body and soul together. Gertrude would have to go to work. Her own property, turned into cash and invested, would bring her a pittance of an income, certainly she could not be expected to share it, either with her husband or daughter.

If Gertrude would make a rich marriage; but time was short. The news of the crash would ruin her chances in Boston. They could not stay abroad. If there were only some millionaire on the Durania who would fall in love with her. Why had they taken this middle class ship? On one of the express boats a beauty like Gertrude would have been able to pick and choose.

There is nothing like shipboard for quickly flowering romance, the sea, the moon, the proposal, one follows the other inevitably. But, stay, there was a millionaire on board! This young Campbell was a Westerner, probably of no family worth mentioning, but few Western families were worth mentioning, in Mrs. Thomas's opinion. He seemed an attractive young man, and Gertrude had already met him.

There were five days of voyage still to come. She must throw them together. And Gertrude must not be told of her father's financial débâcle. She tore the wireless telegram into small pieces just as she had done the letter to Rod McGarry. And she tossed them through the porthole in the same authoritative manner.

Gertrude was sentimental and young. She would not throw herself at the head of a rich young man to save herself and her mother from poverty. But if she liked the rich young man and he proposed to her she would undoubtedly accept him. Mrs. Thomas began to scheme.

When she went on deck she saw Howard and Gertrude promenading, and she smiled with satisfaction. Her rôle was to be unobtrusive. If she objected a little to Gertrude's friendship with Mr. Campbell, it would probably cause the willful daughter to like him better. But she would gain most by keeping out of the way.

There was considerable commotion among the passengers. When the captain told the purser to keep the robbery quiet he reckoned without Mrs. Potter-Dunlap. That lady had never been robbed before, and she was thrilled with the experience.

She was continually being visited by women who had heard rumors and asked for facts which she supplied with great detail. She was not the sort of woman to become popular on a ship, even with her repu-

tation for wealth, but her losses drew the gossip-loving lady passengers to her as molasses draws flies.

A list of suspects was flying around, but the most popular candidate for the theft was the young man who had already been arrested for accosting a girl.

There had been a general rush to the purser's office to deposit money and valuables all morning. Women were vowing that if they suffocated they would never again sleep with their stateroom doors on the hook. All males were gazed at suspiciously, and many unfortunate stewards were scrutinized and found to wear villainous countenances.

There was quite a little talk about the robbery in the smokeroom, but Mr. Higginson did not join it. He had acquired several quiet, but hard drinking, acquaintances and they played bridge from morning until closing time, for comparatively small stakes.

When Rod McGarry drifted in that morning he was cordially greeted by Higginson and invited to sit down and watch the game. At a loss to know what to do with himself he dropped into a chair and puzzled over the mysteries of bridge.

Rod had determined to keep his cabin during the rest of the voyage, but he was not used to confinement, and the bright sunlight shining in his porthole lured him. He started out on deck, but the sight of long rows of women daunted him. He felt sure they would comment about him, and he was right.

So he turned back and proceeded by a long corridor to the smokeroom. He passed a horse-faced woman with a figure like a grenadier who gazed at him in surprise. She knew who he was, everybody on board did, and was amazed to see him at liberty.

The smokeroom was a haven. The bridge players said nothing about his difficulty with the captain, and he was grateful for their silence. When the steward brought a round of drinks he broke his life-long habit and accepted one. Nothing could make him feel worse than the way he did.

He heard the familiar voice of Howard Campbell through an open porthole, and glancing up he saw him pass on the deck

outside with Gertrude Thomas on his arm.

This appeared to him gross disloyalty. He was Howard's friend as well as his employer, and it seemed to him that Howard should have avoided the girl as a consequence of her treatment of him. Instead, he was talking and laughing with her as if nothing had happened.

Mary Norman strolling along, alone, had the same feeling. She turned her head away so as not to see her erstwhile college chum, but she felt that if she had forsworn Gertrude's acquaintance because of her abominable behavior, Howard should be even more indignant with her. Howard was no longer as admirable a person as she had first imagined him.

He had neglected her the night before to entertain the Potter-Dunlaps, and as they had nothing to recommend them beside their money, she felt that it must be the attraction. And since Howard was rich, himself, his willingness to dance with a homely girl must betoken an avaricious nature.

In Rod's case, he felt a spasm of what he thought was indignation at seeing this girl who had treated him as dirt beneath her feet, on apparently very friendly terms with a man whom he did not consider his own equal in character or stability. It simply demonstrated once more what an empty headed person she must be.

And yet he yearned for that girl; he could not nurse his anger against her; she attracted him as a magnet does steel. He knew he had strength enough to turn away and keep away from her, but he would need his strength if she ever evinced a friendly spirit.

And at this minute he saw Higginson deal a card from the bottom of the pack. It was so skillfully done that the players could not have noticed it. If Rod's head had not been turned at a certain angle to peer out the window he would not have noticed it. But there was no doubt about it.

What was to be done? He couldn't prove it; he was not in the game; Higginson was the only one of the four with whom he was in the least acquainted. Well, people who played cards with strangers must look

out for themselves, but he knew now that the man was a crook and probably was the person who had taken the money from his pocketbook that night in the train.

He made an excuse and left the smoke-room. He stood framed in the doorway as Howard and Gertrude came around the corner of the deckhouse. He heard Howard exclaim:

"Why, there he is now!"

Hastily he drew back and reentered the smokeroom. If Howard brought the girl over to him he would have to be polite, and he preferred not to meet her at all. But what had happened to cause her to be willing to meet him?

Last night he had flouted the captain's suggestion that she had agreed to attend a party at which he would be a guest. Had she come to realize how unfair and unjust she had been to him, and did she think he was a man who could be maltreated and walked all over and then say "pleased to meet you?"

But he could not prevent a feeling of pleasure from spreading through his system that it was possible Miss Thomas was no longer hostile to him. Just the same, Howard had no business with her. He had probably been making a lot of explanations to her, and Rod didn't want himself excused and explained. He had done nothing requiring the fixing which was Howard's specialty.

CHAPTER XVII.

CAMPBELL FALLS IN LOVE.

HOWARD CAMPBELL was not in the least to blame, in this case, for his appearance in the company of Rod's beautiful enemy. Gertrude had learned that morning from the captain that the party was off because McGarry did not wish to encounter her.

It threw her into a fury, which was followed by a long deliberation. She wanted to meet this man; she must meet him if only to vindicate herself in her own mind. She was now the injured party. He had silenced her in the corridor, he had sent no answer to a most humble letter, he had re-

fused to attend a party because she would be present.

Well, they were quits for her share in the feud. Now she would like to captivate him, fascinate him, ensnare him, just like a movie vampire, and when he knelt pleading at her feet, she would get even with him by spurning him. But in order to bring him to that pitch she first would have to meet him, and it didn't look as if there were much chance of that happening during the voyage, the way things were going.

When the ship reached Plymouth he would go one way, she and her mother another; they would probably never meet again. Somehow, she did not like the idea of this man wandering through the world hating her for the rest of his life, for no reason at all that she couldn't explain away in two or three minutes of a personal interview.

And then she saw Howard. The beaming smile with which she greeted that self-satisfied young man threw him into a state of rapture. A few minutes with her the day before when she was in a mood of resentment with Mary and himself had not prepared him for the delight of her smile. He had been meditating finding Miss Potter-Dunlap and condoling with her upon her mother's losses, but he changed his mind with great rapidity.

"Good morning, Miss Thomas," he greeted her. "You are a great help to life on board ship, the way you look this morning."

"Really. I don't think I look any different than usual."

"Then it's the sea air that makes me think so."

"It's very nice of you to speak to me after what you and Mary Norman and Mr. McGarry must think of me."

"Oh, that was just a little misunderstanding. I could have cleared it up in a minute if you or Rod would have given me half a chance."

"I presume you and Mary think I complained about him to the captain."

Howard looked a bit embarrassed.

"Why, er—it wasn't any of our business to think about it all."

"Mary made it her business. She has

crossed me off her list of friends. But I want you to know I had nothing to do with it at all. I was perfectly horrified when the captain told me what he had done."

"I knew you wouldn't have wanted him shut up for a little thing like that. The old captain just went ahead and used his judgment, what?"

"I never spoke to the captain at all. It was mother."

"Oh!" exclaimed Howard. "I see it all. Mothers always take these things too seriously. Well, don't let's worry about it. Rod is loose again. The old chump says he won't come out now that he is allowed to, but this fine weather will drag him out. He'll be all right. Let's you and I take a walk around the deck. It only needs somebody like you to make it the happiest walk of my life."

"How extravagant you are," she smiled, falling into step beside him. "But the whole affair was the most miserable series of accidents that ever happened. Of course, Mr. McGarry has a right to feel huffed, but don't you think if I were to explain things to him he would see them in the right light?"

"You could explain anything to me, but how are you going to explain the way you froze him up the first day out."

"I can't explain that, but after all, it wasn't anything, and it simply happened because I was so surprised. I intended to apologize to him after he saved me from falling downstairs, but he just glared at me when I approached him."

"That must have been just after he was pinched," grinned Howard.

"But then I wrote him a letter explaining everything and he never answered it."

"He never told me anything about that. Now, Rod isn't spiteful, he couldn't carry a grudge, or he would have thrown me overboard for some of the things I've done to him."

"And the captain offered to give a special party for him to-night and I offered to come. Do you know he refused to accept the invitation from the captain because I was going to be there?"

"Something else he didn't tell me. Say, you've done enough. Let the old bear sulk.

You're some girl. I tell you not many would have gone to all that trouble for an old hick they didn't know."

"I felt so sorry for him."

"Cheer up. Forget him. Little Howard Campbell is around to play with you. I'll give you a good time on this ship."

"If you have time from your other friends."

"They are all scratched. From now on you are the only entry."

"If we could only meet Mr. McGarry, walking along the deck, sort of casually. Then I could talk with him and I'm sure everything would be all right."

"Not a chance. He won't come out. Let's you and I climb up on the sun deck and play shuffleboard. I bet you can beat me."

"Presently. I really wish to talk to Mr. McGarry, and I want you to bring him over."

"Carry him over. He's afraid of you, surest thing you know. But I'll tell him how everything happened."

"I told him all that in the letter he never answered."

Howard began to be bored with the subject. Conversation about another man did not interest him much.

"Leave him to me. I'll have him eating out of your lily white hand in no time at all."

"Why, there he is!"

It was at that moment that Rod had appeared at the smokeroom exit and Gertrude had spotted him before Howard. She saw that he saw her and she saw him draw back. Her color rose and her heart sank. It was going to be terribly difficult. But she managed to laugh and said merrily:

"All right, let's try that game of shuffleboard. I've never had a chance to play it. And I've got to make my peace with Mary Norman. No wonder she was indignant with me if she thought I went to the captain about poor Mr. McGarry. I'm so glad he has come out of his stateroom. At least he isn't confined there any longer."

They found a deck steward who supplied them with the disks and shovel-shaped sticks necessary for the game and who rapidly drew with chalk upon the deck the

series of squares which are the source of the score. They played vigorously for about an hour, squabbled like children over points gained and lost, and appeared to be fast becoming friends.

When Gertrude went down below she found her mother lying in her berth. She had a raging headache as a result of the bad news she had decided to keep from Gertrude, but she was able to talk with her about a subject close to her heart.

"I saw you walking with Mr. Campbell," she said. "Is he nice?"

"He's rather good fun. He is very witty."

"I'm told he is very rich, and comes from one of the best families in Kansas City."

"Is he? Does he?" queried Gertrude most indifferently.

"Mind you don't become too friendly on this voyage," said her mother archly.

"You needn't worry. I was with him because I was anxious to find out about Mr. McGarry."

"That secretary person. Don't be silly. And I have decided that we cannot go to the captain's ridiculous party for him."

"We won't. There isn't going to be any party. Mr. McGarry doesn't want to meet us."

"Why the very idea!" declared Mrs. Thomas sitting upright. "Of all the insolence I ever met in my life."

"Mr. McGarry has as much right to decide who he will meet on board ship as we have," retorted Gertrude quietly. "He probably thinks that women who created a rumpus about nothing, and got him locked in his cabin on a false charge, are not worthy of his time and attention."

"Rubbish. Any man would be glad to know you."

"Except this one."

"Well, you may spend your time with Mr. Campbell. I'm sure he is much nicer."

"I wonder," said Gertrude rather pensively.

When Gertrude left Howard Campbell after their game of shuffleboard she had no idea that she had created a lover by her two hours of agreeable companionship. Howard was madly, furiously in love with her. He had fallen completely and abso-

lutely a victim of her beauty and graciousness.

It was not the first time that he had been in love, for he was susceptible to a remarkable degree. There had been a half dozen girls during his college course, most of whom he would have married had he been in a position to support a wife, and as each came along he had been convinced that she was his only true passion.

Mary Norman's sweetness and attractiveness had begun to have the usual effect when he first set eyes on Gertrude. Her hauteur and apparent bad temper had frozen him, but now that he knew what she really was like, he let himself go completely.

That she was rich, and he did not have a dollar, no longer suggested itself; there was no self interest in his passion. As he walked along the promenade deck he passed Miss Potter-Dunlap without seeing her, and when she spoke to him he answered her in a most absent-minded fashion. She reported this to her mother as suspicious.

He had to talk about Gertrude to some one, so he went down to his stateroom where he found Rod had again established himself.

"You are all wrong about Miss Thomas," he declared as soon as he had flung his cap on the lower berth. "She's the sweetest and most charming girl in the world."

"You can't prove it by me," said Rod grimly. "I should have thought some sense of decency would have made you keep away from her after what she did to me. But you wait. If she had me locked up for making one remark, she will probably have you hanged for walking around the deck with her."

"Darn it, Rod, that was all a mistake. It was her mother who complained to the captain, not Gertrude."

"Gertrude! You travel fast on short acquaintance. If she hadn't complained to her mother, mother wouldn't have told the captain. Isn't that logic?"

"I tell you it was a complete misunderstanding and now she wants to talk to you and explain everything."

"You mean you have been fixing things up, as usual."

"Well, of course, I try to do my best for you all the time. After all, I'm working for you."

"Thank you for nothing. Miss Thomas is one person on this ship who isn't going to talk to me."

"Then you are a darned old sorehead. I think it is only fair to tell you that I've fallen for her hard. If you fire me for doing it, and I have to swim back to America, I'm going to let her bask in the favor of my countenance just as much as she will go in for basking."

"What could she say to me? There's nothing to explain. It's the most open and shut case I ever heard of. She's just got curious to know what her victim is like; wants to see if I'm filled with sawdust."

"All right. You heard about the Potter-Dunlap jewel robbery?"

"Not a word. I haven't been talking to anybody much."

Howard told him the facts as they were known to the passengers.

"I've been the goat so far on board this ship, I suppose they'll try to pin this on to me," growled Rod.

"You've got an alibi. You were in durance vile. But I was around with the Dunlaps all last evening, danced with the daughter, flattered the mother and made a fool of myself."

"Why?"

In his new birth of love Howard was ashamed of his mercenary ideas of the day before. He colored. "I had a notion I might shine up to the girl. She's as rich as mud. But nothing like that now. If Gertrude Thomas won't have me, I'll never marry."

"Miss Thomas is rich, too. Didn't Miss Norman say so?"

"I don't care anything about money. By the way, I'm flat. Can I borrow twenty on next week's salary?"

Rod shelled out.

"Don't ask me to come to visit you when you are married. I'm one friend of yours that your wife won't have near the house; that is, if she marries you." He grinned, despite the unaccountably jealous feeling that Howard's matrimonial declaration had caused him to feel. "If she mar-

ries you I'll declare quits. I couldn't wish her worse luck."

"You've got Gertrude wrong, old man," declared Howard earnestly. "You are away off about her. She has the sweetest, loveliest, kindest nature in the world."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Rod. "That I should have to hear such things."

"You don't know her."

"I think I know who stole those jewels. It was Higginson, the man who took my money on the train. I was watching him play bridge this morning and saw him deal a card off the bottom of the deck. He's a crook."

Howard whistled in surprise. Then an expression of satisfaction came over his face.

"So that's how he got thirty bucks out of me on the train. I thought I wasn't such a rotten bridge player as I looked that afternoon. But because he's a gambler, doesn't mean he's a burglar."

"It means he's dishonest, and some dishonest person stole your friend's jewelry. I think he took them just as surely as he got my twenty-two hundred dollars."

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we found some way to recover both," Howard remarked. "Probably Mrs. Potter-Dunlap will offer a reward. Would you give a reward for the return of your money?"

Rod laughed loudly. "You forget that the rich Mr. Campbell wouldn't dream of collecting a reward from a lady for recovering her jewels. If you turn detective you must do it for love. And I won't pay any reward to you because it was your fault I lost the money, since you scraped acquaintance with this crook and his friends."

"It would be a feather in my cap if I recovered them, just the same."

"Go to it. How are you going to start?"

"Well, we'll have to trail the fellow. That's what they always do. Say this boat is beginning to rock."

He was right. The Durania, until now as steady as a hotel, had begun to roll with a slow, but considerable motion. Through the porthole they could see the light blue of the sky give place to the dark blue of the sea. The dividing line rose above the top of the porthole, and the ocean shown in the

circle was flecked with white caps. Then the reverse motion began, and the sea slipped down until a complete disk of sky replaced it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HEAVY WEATHER.

IT was the first experience of the two inlanders with the swell of old ocean. Both thought of seasickness and wondered if they would succumb.

"If this keeps up I bet a lot of ladies won't show up for dinner," declared Howard.

"And quite a few men, including one from Kansas City. You are white under the gills already."

"Nothing of the kind. It would take more than a little bit of a roll to bother me. I think this cabin is kind of stuffy, though. Let's get out on deck where there is plenty of fresh air."

Rod was willing, for he was none too certain of his own ability to resist paying tribute to Neptune. So they made their way on deck and sank into their chairs.

It began to look as if the Durania were in for a blow. Heavy clouds had obscured the blue of the sky. Deckhands were busy fastening up the wide, plate glass windows which enclosed the shelter deck while others were putting in position wide strips of canvas along the unprotected portion of the ship's rail.

A number of women had become seasick in anticipation. They lay back, white and still, in their chairs, wincing inwardly at every gentle roll of the ship and attracting to themselves, through the power of imagination, the illness they would avoid.

Captain Brown was making his way along the deck, pausing at every third or fourth deck chair to assure anxious women that no dreadful storm was expected. He noticed Campbell and McGarry and went over to them.

"Glad to see you on deck again, Mr. McGarry," he said in a bluff and intentionally loud tone. "Hope you are not feeling this bit of sea?"

"We are inlanders, captain," said How-

ard, "and we don't know whether we are going to cave in or not. I can tell you that I prefer this ship when she isn't dancing around."

"It will be worse before it's better," said the captain, smiling. "The glass has been falling and we are in for a blow, but it won't be anything very serious. This isn't the hurricane season."

"I want to thank you for your courtesy to me last night," said Rod. "I must have seemed very ungracious, but you know what a predicament I was in."

"It's all right, my boy. I was very hasty. The young lady in question laid me out when she heard about it, and I was trying to make amends. By the way, Mr. Campbell, are you in business in Kansas City?"

"Why, not exactly," said Howard uneasily.

"You draw your income from some business in that city, don't you?"

"Er—yes. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I had a chap make me an investment proposition. Something out that way. I thought I might ask your advice."

"I'll be very pleased to make inquiries for you, captain. I'm not much of a business man myself."

"We'll go into the matter later," said the skipper, rising. "We're going to get a lot of rain in a few minutes and I'm going up on the bridge for a while. So I must get into my oilskins."

"Why do you suppose he asked me about Kansas City?" demanded Howard.

"He explained."

"Yes, but it sounded kind of fishy."

"So did your answers to his question."

"I wish we hadn't changed places. It would seem queer to anybody who found out about it."

"We didn't change places. We retained our own names. I told you to say we were friends, but this secretary business is a disease with you. It's your fault if everybody on board thinks you are rich and I am your secretary. I haven't discussed our affairs with anybody."

"Supposing they go to suspecting me of having made off with the old lady's jewelry?"

"You can get suspected easier on this ship than any place I have ever been in. Look at me."

"I'm about the only man they have spoken to at all. I think I had better go find them and sort of make them realize I couldn't have had anything to do with it."

"Go ahead," said Rod. "I'll read this magazine."

He had picked up a magazine from a vacant chair at his right. In a few minutes he was absorbed in an article regarding potato bugs. The article was wrong in several places, but it was well written, and dealt with a subject with which he was familiar.

Somebody came and occupied the chair at his left. He did not look up.

There was a polite cough. Then a timid, small, sweet voice said:

"Mr. McGarry."

He looked up with a start. Gertrude Thomas sat in the chair beside him. She was leaning forward and looking at him with wide, dark eyes. She was obviously frightened.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



ON PACIFIC'S BEACH

THE purple mountain towers high
Against a gold and crimson sky.
This great sea powders into white.
And yet—oh, Broadway at night!

Mary Carolyn Davies.



Modern Castaways.

By FRANK E. CARSON

PROPPED against a rock on the glistening beach, Lew Ammon cursed the receding stern of the Molly M. until it became a mere speck and a blurb of smoke on the horizon. Turning then to vent a measure of his spleen upon his companion he discovered the latter sprawled full length on the sand—sound asleep. Lew swore hoarsely, gave the recumbent form a disgusted kick, and hunched back against the rock in melancholy contemplation of their plight.

Three weeks ago San Francisco papers—one at least—had modestly announced that "Dynamite" Breen, the well-known Eastern middleweight boxer, with his manager, Lew Ammon, had booked passage for Melbourne, Australia, on the steamer Molly M. In substance this was true. Dynamite Breen was from the East, where he was more or less well known in fistiana circles; and it was nobody's business if the pair—lacking passage money—chose to travel fo'castle instead of first cabin.

From the start the voyage had proved a turbulent one. Land-lubbers from hair

to toe nails neither the pugilist nor his dapper manager fitted into the scheme of things and all hands took vicious delight in telling them so. Incensed eventually to the fighting point Dynamite Breen blew up with a reverberant bang, and when the smoke lifted most of the jeering crew were in the scuppers, the second mate was in the hospital, and the well-known Eastern middleweight was in the brig.

The skipper—a brother-in-law of the mate and also sole owner of the tramp, Molly M., decided to dispense with the services of the brawler and his less dangerous but equally worthless companion at the first opportunity. Being a creator of opportunities he forthwith veered off course, deposited Dynamite Breen and the profanely protesting Mr. Ammon upon the nearest of the many chartered but little known islands in the Southern Pacific, and steamed merrily on his way to Melbourne.

When Lew Ammon awoke—for he, too, fell a victim to the seductive spell of warm sand and lapping water—the sun was low on the horizon and there was a slight chill

In the air. For a moment he lay blinking at the cloudless sky and listening to the buzz-saw snores of the man at his side.

Gradually there came to him, subconsciously first, then consciously, a feeling that he was being watched. Turning slowly to raise himself on one elbow Ammon caught a sharp breath and a sudden tremor shot through his body. Jerking to a sitting position, the astounded man swept staring, protruding eyes to the right, to the left and to the rear. They, he and Dynamite Breen, were the center of a complete circle of crouching black men.

The faces of these men were grotesque and ugly and smeared with streaks and daubs of white and yellow paint. Huge white rings dangled from their ears; their bodies were almost nude. Each squatting figure held a spear, each face leered and grinned. Ammon kicked his companion into consciousness.

"Wot's th' big idea?" demanded Breen, sitting up and rubbing heavy eyes. "What do ya—? G-g-g—!"

An amazed exclamation died a choking gurgle in his throat as the fighter scrambled to his feet. His small, deep set eyes batted and blinked at the surrounding sea of black faces; he assumed a defensive crouch and raised his arms in front of his body, fists clenched.

Lew Ammon clawed desperately at those arms. "Don't rile 'em, Dynamite! My Gawd! Don't rile 'em fellows!" he begged piteously.

Dynamite Breen hadn't the slightest intention of riling 'em. His fighting attitude had been purely instinctive. Courage in a ring, against one man armed with padded gloves, was an entirely different proposition from courage out here on a desert island facing a score of men, cannibals perhaps, with spears. The well-known American middleweight's knees threatened serious injury to one another, his heart hovered quivering just back of his tonsils, beads of perspiration dotted his sloping brow. Dynamite Breen was scared.

As yet not a sound escaped the thick, round lips of the squatting natives; none, in fact, had so much as moved a muscle. One, evidently their leader, rose now and

stepped inside the circle facing the white men.

He was a huge, burly buck, towering a good six inches above Dynamite Breen, and he wore—in addition to the regulation breech-cloth and earrings, a soiled, white celluloid collar about his black neck and what had evidently been a pearl gray hat of the bowler type on his head. From his lips came a torrent of guttural phrases in an unknown tongue.

"Wot's he sayin, Lew?" Dynamite asked, drawing a shaky hand across his forehead.

"H-h-how d-do I know," replied Ammon through chattering teeth.

The black man added a series of equally unintelligible gestures to his speech and then swung about and uttered a sharp command to the others. Silently they rose from their haunches and formed a row upon two sides of the trio, their leader pointed toward a line of foliage which sprang up some distance back from the sea and mouthed more guttural expressions to the dazed white men.

"He's giving us the office to go some place with 'em," Lew explained weakly, "an' I guess our ticket reads his way."

Dynamite nodded, and, with the big black in the lead and a line of natives in light marching formation on either side of them, they got under way.

"You played hell, you did—smackin' that mate," Ammon wailed as they walked. "These guys are Australian head hunters, that's what they are. I read about 'em one time. Gawd, how I wish I'd stayed in the U. S. A."

"You an' me both," echoed the fighter, shaking his battered head from side to side to add emphasis to the statement, "Where do yuh reckon that boss black got th' collar an' th' gray Bennie?" he asked, after a listless period of thrusting one unwilling foot ahead of the other. "Some bloke they killed an' et?"

Ammon nodded. "A missionary, most likely," he suggested morbidly. "They're specially fond of white missionaries."

"They'll find my carcass a dam' sight tougher chewin' than missionary hide," declared Dynamite grimly.

The dapper one shivered and unconsciously slowed his pace only to be deftly prodded with the business end of a spear in the hands of a grinning native. By now they were well within the fringe of tropical vegetation which had been visible from the beach, and as they penetrated farther inshore the undergrowth became so thick it was necessary to proceed single file at the heels of their leader. Then, with an almost stifling suddenness, night dropped upon them. Lew thought of slipping out of the line and running for it, but a glance at the dense blackness on either side of the trail sent cold chills chasing up and down his spine.

In silence, except for the snapping of a twig, the stumbling foot of one of the prisoners, or the rattle of a spear against overhanging foliage, the band traveled on for almost an hour when an occasional gleam of light through the trees ahead gave evidence that they were approaching their destination.

Coming suddenly upon a clearing the leader slowed down, the party spread out in their guard of honor positions and the two white men stared dumfounded at the panorama before their eyes.

Ahead was the native village, a group of rude huts huddled in a semblance of order about a solitary main thoroughfare—but what a thoroughfare! Arched across it at four different points in the scant two hundred yards of its length were rows of *electric lights*.

The glow from them illumined the fronts of a row of huts on either side, and from this distance, to the amazed watchers, formed a gleaming, yellow swath through the dark village.

"Wot th' hell! They havin' a street fair or somepin'?" gasped Dynamite Breen incredulously.

Lew Ammon's mouth was opening and closing convulsively, but words failed to emerge from it.

The pace increased now and they advanced rapidly down a gradual slope toward the village. At the outskirts, just as they were about to enter the brilliantly-lighted thoroughfare, Ammon gave a choking gasp. Just ahead, to the right of and

facing the pathway, loomed a huge, square sign board illumined by a solitary electric bulb. Upon it, in English, were the words:

You are now entering the village of Kiw-yourrani. Drive slow and see our city; drive fast and see our jail.

"For th' cripes sake!" Dynamite Breen came to a dead stop and blinked up at the message.

His astounded face and the equally dazed countenance of his companion aroused a great outburst of chattering and gesticulating among the black men. They seemed proud of this modern touch and as the party proceeded on at a slower pace their grinning leader drew the attention of his captives to the other side of the huge board. It too bore a sign, and in the glow of the bulb before it they read:

Thank you. Come again.

Evidently their approach had been heralded in the village, for a swarm of native men, women and children lined the main street to bid them welcome. The men were black and brown and cut from the same pattern as the marching guard, wearing for the most part the same meager breech-cloth and white earrings. The feminine members of the tribe wore short skirts of native grass; the children either skirts or breech-cloths or nothing at all. Here and there in the grinning mob appeared a touch of civilization; a plaid cap on the kinky head of a broad native woman, several battered high silk hats on other heads.

Except for a low, discreet undercurrent of chatter along the massed side lines the entrance of the party was devoid of noise and excitement. The staring eyes of the white prisoners opened wider with every step. Practically every hut along the street bore an easily distinguishable sign.

"Elite Candy Shoppe," appeared across the front of a squat, grass roofed shack. "Quality Shoe Repairing While You Wait," read the legend over an equally squalid appearing hut. "Greasy Spoon Café. Eat Here and Die at Home," blared another. None possessed a window or a door—merely a tiny, low opening—so the amazed visitors

had no way of knowing whether they actually were what they claimed.

One large hut, much bigger and better constructed than the rest, proudly proclaimed its wares by a well-illuminated sign which extended all the way across its broad front.

TIMES SQUARE THEATER

First Run Pictures

The audience had apparently abandoned the show in favor of the attraction outside, for they were banked six grinning rows deep before the entrance to the theater.

"For th' cryin' out loud!" Dynamite Breen mumbled over and over in an awed voice as they marched along.

KIWYOURRANIAN HOT DOGS A NICKEL

Kindly have exact change ready

So read the bold inscription above a small boothlike stall, in which a greasy, black-skinned fellow held forth. Orderly piles of round, flat, buff-colored edibles—evidently Kiwyourranian Hot Dogs—lined the counter before him, but business was practically at a standstill. The two white men were the attraction de luxe.

The party, with the crowd surging in behind their line of march, proceeded to the far end of the lighted thoroughfare and halted, at a signal from the leader, before a moderate sized, round domed, thatched hut. A neatly lettered sign over the low doorway announced:

HOTEL ASTOR

A room with a bath for a dollar and a half.

Underneath this legend, in considerably smaller letters, appeared a tense admonition to "Try and Get It."

With an elaborate bow the burly leader motioned the two white men to go inside. They hesitated tremulously. It was dark in there—the sea of black faces on three sides of them were grinning expectantly. Suppose this was a trap—the novel, native method of decapitating their prisoners. Suppose—"You go first, Dynamite!" Ammon suggested feebly.

The fighter gave a slight shudder, flung back his burly shoulders, projected his undershung jaw aggressively, clenched both hairy fists and started forward. "C'mon,"

he hissed grimly. "We'll put a dinge or two to th' cleaners before they get us."

Inside the blackness was intensified by contrast with the lighted street they had just left. They groped for several tense seconds in the dark—nothing happened. A sudden click and the place was flooded with light.

Blinking confusedly they observed the presence of the celluloid collar leader of their guard of honor who had noiselessly followed them in and snapped on the light. Without a word he pointed to four banked cots arranged in an orderly row along the far wall of the hut.

Night passed without incident and in the morning, while the still dazed guests of the Hotel Astor were breakfasting from a number of unfamiliar though by no means unsavory native dishes, an emissary from the royal palace made his appearance. "Hello, white guys!" he announced, by way of introducing himself.

Both glanced up to see a diminutive, elderly black person with a head several sizes too large for his wizened body grinning at them from the doorway.

"Hello, yourself!" Ammon replied jauntily.

"Caploca loney slub slub guzzo," said the native—or words to that effect.

A good night's rest and a full stomach had done wonders for Lew Ammon and Dynamite Breen. "Sure," nodded the latter, genially, "we'll take six of 'em—red ones."

The native's grin expanded. "You come—go king—gotta see," he declared in guttural English.

"What say, George?" asked Lew.

"King gotta see—you come—damn quick!" The black punctuated this remark with a series of explanatory gestures.

"There's a king in the deck some place," Ammon explained to his companion, "An' we're evidently invited to have a chat with the old boy. Guess we better start travelin'." He rose and stuffed a last, sticky morsel of food in his mouth. "These here kings take themselves pretty serious—they have to, because there ain't many of 'em left any more."

Outside Dynamite Breen, who once had worked in a garage, uttered an exclamation:

"I thought I heard a flivver barkin' out here some place," he said; and he was right, for a small battered touring car of the well-known American make was chugging in the street before the Hotel Astor.

In the front seat sat two natives clad in gaudy red coats and caps of the type favored by minstrel bands. Both uniforms were grimy and somewhat the worse for age, but their wearers sat stiff-backed, eyes straight ahead in the full dignity of their positions as servants of the king.

"Pretty soft, eh?" Ammon chirped as they clambered into the rear seat with their guide.

The journey was both speedy and brief. With a great clattering of machinery and a constant br-ring of the horn the flivver sped down the main street, scattering playing native children before it, for a bare hundred yards, then veered up a narrower street on two wheels and came to an abrupt halt before a circular-shaped hut, larger and more elaborately appearing than its immediate neighbors. A sign above the entrance read:

King's Palace. Visitors Welcome.
Don't feed the animals

A number of natives with spears and red coats and caps—but sans trousers—sprang to attention as the visiting delegation proceeded inside. Here, as soon as their eyes became accustomed to the gloom, the two white men discovered themselves in a huge, circular-shaped room, the walls of which were draped with native tapestry of woven grass, brilliantly colored. The earthen floor was covered with rugs of a similar construction and to their right a low platform piled high with skins of various kinds gave evidence of being the kingly bed. Directly in front of them, in a chair of American manufacture, upon a still higher platform, with his back to the opposite wall of the hut, sat his majesty the king of Kiwyourrani.

He was a pudgy, fat little king. His short, thick legs were incased in white linen trousers; his ample chest was haphazardly buttoned inside a short, vivid scarlet bell-boy jacket, the front of which was a mass of glittering medals in varied shapes and

sizes. Atop his broad head rested a papier-mâché crown tilted at a jaunty angle and at least a dozen strings of glittering beads hung from his thick, black neck. His feet and arms were bare and upon one fat wrist, among a miscellaneous assortment of native bracelets, glowed the luminous dial of a cheap wrist-watch. He beamed good naturedly down upon his visitors.

"Hot-dam!" he roared in a deep, fog-horn voice.

"King say hello," explained the wizened native, who was evidently the royal interpreter.

"Hello, king. How's tricks?" Lew Ammon bowed low before his majesty.

"Hot-dam! *Oggle wu gussu loney slub?*" returned his royal highness genially. It seemed to be a question.

"Again please?" begged Lew, anxious to be of service.

The king contorted his broad face into an irritable grimace and let loose a torrent of native words at the interpreter.

"Wot th' hell's he raving about, do you s'pose?" Dynamite Breen turned anxiously to his manager.

"King—say—grind-box—where?" The worried interpreter spoke slowly to Lew, as though groping for a way to make himself understood. He raised one black hand to his forehead, leaned forward a little and made a slow, circular motion with his free arm. "Grind-box," he repeated earnestly. "Where grind-box?"

Ammon stared, a puzzled crease in his forehead. "You'll have to do better than that, George," he declared after a bit, with a shake of the head. "No sabe at all. Do you make him, Dynamite?" He turned to the fighter.

"It's all wop lingo to me," Dynamite returned.

The hard working interpreter tried again and his majesty added another barrage of royal reproof with no success. Suddenly the elderly native got the flash of a brilliant idea. He ceased his gymnastic efforts and grabbing one of Ammon's hands dragged him closer to the throne—so close that the medals upon the king's scarlet chest were easily distinguishable. One, a button, Ammon perceived, read: "Keep

Cool with Coolidge," another bore the flip-pant phrase, "Oh, You Kid!" and the words "Private Detective," greeted him from a glittering metal shield.

The interpreter, however, was concerned with just one. It was a huge, round, leather affair, suspended from a steel safety-pin by a three inch length of wide, white ribbon. With a great-verbal to-do in his own language he motioned Ammon to observe the inscription which had been printed upon the face of the leather in small type. Lew moved his face a few inches closer and read:

Presented to His Majesty King Lukino of Kiwyourrani by the Allstar Motion Pictures Corporation of America in sincere appreciation of his generous hospitality, and the assistance of his subjects in the filming of the celebrated Allstar Feature, "A South Sea Siren."

A gleam of intelligence gradually replaced the hitherto puzzled expression upon Lew Ammon's face. Both his majesty and the withered little interpreter perceived it and began a joyous clatter.

"Hot-dam!" yelled the king, moving his fat body up and down on the throne. "Hot-dam! Hot-dog! Shoot-a-buck! Hell!"

Which was no doubt the sum total of King Lukino's English vocabulary.

II.

THE leather medal somewhat cleared the haze in which the two castaways had been dwelling since their arrival at the native village the previous evening. Evidently the island had recently been visited by an American moving picture company. From all indications they had remained some time and had left behind, when they departed, a more or less portable electric light plant, a motion picture projecting machine and several reels of film, a flivver, a wheezy phonograph, not to mention the gorgeous wardrobe of his royal majesty and the uniforms and odds and ends of civilized garments which adorned a number of his dusky subjects. The signs were apparently the handiwork of a scenic artist with a sense of humor.

King Lukino was greatly disappointed upon learning that the two white strangers

had neglected to bring along a "grind-box," i. e., a motion picture camera. He had—so it seemed—a burning desire to again disport himself before the clicking lens and since, in his limited experience, the white race and the camera were inseparable it was rather difficult convincing him that they had none.

Lew Ammon finally quit trying and got word to his majesty, through the royal interpreter, that their camera had been wrecked in landing and that they were expecting another by radio soon. Thus appeased his royal highness unbent and gave the two visitors the key to the city—figuratively speaking.

It was a soft life—as Dynamite put it—living in solitary grandeur at the Hotel Astor, their food brought to their suite three times a day by native servants, nothing whatsoever to do between times but doze, stroll along the beach, or perhaps go swimming or canoe riding. It *was* soft—Ammon admitted grudgingly—but confounded monotonous!

They attended the Times Square Theater the first few evenings, where they sat upon grass rugs among a huddled mass of black shapes who watched every move on the flickering screen in rapt attention and absolute silence. This soon palled because the local supply of film was limited to two programs and these were scarred and jerky and practically worn out from constant repetition. Besides, the entrance had to be almost hermetically sealed to keep out the swarms of tropical insects attracted by the light and the air inside the close packed place was terrible.

The theater, the hotel and the king's palace were the only buildings in the village wired for electricity and Lew Ammon vaguely wondered whether the natives would expect them—as members of the race which had created this "night-time daylight"—to fix things when the supply of gasoline, thoughtfully left by the Allstar Company for the light plant motor and the flivver, was exhausted.

Dynamite Breen actually enjoyed the barbaric life of ease and luxury; Ammon grew to hate it. A month dragged by.

"Good Lord, Dynamite," Lew exploded

at breakfast one morning, "we've simply gotta get away from here!"

"How?" grunted the fighter, from between mouthfuls of native stew. "Swim, or fly?"

Ammon swore viciously. A look of contempt appeared on his face as he watched his companion shovel great quantities of greasy food into his capacious mouth, "I'll bet you'll scale two hundred, an' you're goin' up five pounds a day." He grunted disgustedly. "How do you ever expect to get down to the middleweight limit again—gorgin' yourself with this slimy, sickening junk an' doin' your road work on your back on that cot over there?"

"Wot's th' odds?" Dynamite retorted. "There ain't nobody to fight out here, an' no prospects of us ever gettin' off. Me—I'm gonna take it easy the rest of my life. My workin' days are over. I got my eye on a little, dusky frail here who—"

Lew Ammon flounced angrily from the hut. He walked several miles along the smooth, sandy beach during the cooling off process, and then cut inshore and sought the shelter of a clump of foliage at the edge of the jungle. The sun was dipping toward the horizon line when he started back to the village. But Ammon had an idea.

He secured an audience with the king next morning, and with the aid of the royal interpreter succeeded in securing his majesty's permission to proceed with the plan. King Lukino was a genial monarch, though a jealous one, and his official O. K. was required for just about everything which took place on the island.

Dynamite Breen refused to enthuse over the scheme. "Cripes, Lew," he said disparagingly, "we ain't got no pillows, or no bag, or ring or nothin'."

"We can make gloves outa some of these loose elephant hides, or whatever they are—and we can also stick up a sixteen-foot ring right in the center of this hut. An' I guess we can stagger along without a punchin' bag."

Despite the ex-middleweight fighter's grumbling protests Lew Ammon went ahead with preparations to open the Breen-Ammon School of Boxing in their suite at the Hotel Astor. His purpose was twofold. First, the

school would give them something to do to break the monotony; second, and of most importance, it would rouse Dynamite Breen out of this indolent, lethargic state into which he was skidding—or rather, had already skidded.

Lew couldn't reconcile himself to the belief that they were doomed to spend the remainder of their lives on this tropical island. Somehow, some time, some passing ship would save them—as it invariably did in the movies and magazine stories—and with the tin-eared ring warrior, Dynamite Breen, hog fat and unable creditably to capitalize upon the publicity that would be theirs once they touched a civilized port—well, it was a contingency to be avoided.

Under Ammon's supervision a ring of sorts was pitched in the center of their hut and, after a number of failures, he succeeded in designing and manufacturing a crude set of padded gloves from the material available. With these for patterns he cut a number of additional sets from skins and instructed a group of native women in the art of stuffing and sewing them.

Just about the entire male population of the village responded to the call for students—mainly, no doubt, through curiosity. They had all enjoyed acting for the movies and perhaps this queer, new white man's game was going to prove equally interesting. It required considerable diplomacy on Ammon's part to reject four-fifths of them, but he succeeded, with no casualties, and soon a class of some thirty young Kiwyouranian bucks were learning the rudiments of the manly art of self-defense under the capable but sulky supervision of Dynamite Breen.

Naturally athletic—the pick of the tribe—they took to the game like ducks to water. Then the energetic Mr. Ammon got another brilliant idea. Why not pull off a boxing tournament, and, if it registered, make it a regular weekly or bi-weekly event?

Shrewdly picking the cream of the flyweight, light, middle and heavyweight divisions, Lew promoted and carried to a successful conclusion the first boxing carnival ever held upon the island of Kiwyourrani. The Times Square Theater couldn't accom-

modate the crowd which wanted to attend the bouts, and every smack of a gloved hand against a tense, dusky face or a glistening body brought a scream of joy to the lips of the fortunate spectators.

With this for a starter Ammon caused an outdoor ring to be constructed on the sandy beach which extended seaward from the village for a full half mile at low tide, and boxing quickly became the great national pastime. Invariably the glove contests were held in the early morning before the sun grew too hot.

Gradually, as his duties became more strenuous with the increasing ability of his pupils, Dynamite Breen's protuberant paunch receded, the flabby bunches of fat about his neck and arms disappeared and he began to show evidences of his former vim and dash. He rather enjoyed the change, too, after the first few groaning weeks, and Lew Ammon was gleefully congratulating himself on the success of his scheme when a new complication arose.

One of the native belles, a light brown, fawn-eyed, perfectly formed female, developed a burning heart affection for Dynamite Breen. She took to following him about wherever he went with doglike persistence, and to smiling coyly up into his battered countenance whenever he looked at her; which, of course, he did frequently since even Ammon had to admit that she was by no means hard on the eyes.

The affair progressed, as affairs of this sort will, until Lew Ammon grew worried. He took the fighter to task about it one evening.

"Wot are you crabbin' about—want th' jane yourself?" Dynamite retorted hotly.

"No," snapped Ammon, "but I don't like to see you making a fool of yourself over her."

"Aw, forget it, ol' sour grapes!" the other advised. "She's some little queen, she is; an' I'm learnin' her to speak English. You oughta hear her call me daddy. I'll bet she'd knock them Fifth Avenue frails for a row if she had th' right kinda rags."

Lew ceased to complain for the time being, but matters took a more serious turn when both he and Dynamite received a summons from the king a few days later.

His rotund majesty, the elderly, wizened court interpreter and a huge buck, one of the most promising among the local heavy-weight boxers, awaited them at the royal palace.

"Hot-dam!" said the king genially, as they entered.

Both bowed grave acknowledgment of the royal greeting. They also nodded to the interpreter and waved an airy salute at their burly pupil, but the latter stood rigid, arms folded upon his broad, black chest and his beady eyes trained malevolently upon Dynamite Breen's face. The little interpreter wasted no time in preliminaries.

"Weequa," he announced, pointing toward the scowling native, "fight—um—scar-face," jerking a black thumb in Dynamite's direction. "No—fight—spear—king—no—let—do. Fight um—white man way ugh!" The narrator illustrated with a series of pugilistic gestures. "Moyo—to—him—ah—arr—*subina*"—he groped desperately for an English word—"to him lick." He concluded triumphantly.

"I make him, Lew," Dynamite spoke up with a surprising burst of intelligence. "The big dinge here is the gal Moyo's ex-sweetie. I used to see 'em together a lot before we got clubby. He wants to fight me for the frail. Boy—he's steppin' right into my kitchen! I'll knock that flat-nosed map of his—"

"But you don't want the girl," Ammon protested vehemently. "Not bad enough, I mean, to start a row over her. You can't tell about these here natives—why, the whole gang may—"

"Th' hell I don't want that gal!" Dynamite broke in sharply. "I'll take her now if I got to lick the whole blame tribe."

In vain the worried Lew pleaded and argued, in vain he tried to block the arrangements for a fistic encounter between the two suitors for the hand of the native girl. The odds were against him. The king was for it, both principals were rarin' to go, and the interpreter was neutral.

Evidently the dusky warrior, Weequa, had begged royal permission to challenge his enemy to the customary duel to the death with spears, but his highness, out of courtesy for the white man, had drawn

the line at so bloodthirsty a method and had suggested settling the affair by means of the fascinating new game of boxing. Weequa was decidedly Dynamite Breen's inferior as a glove artist, but he outweighed the white man at least forty pounds, was twice as mad, and in such state had no fear for the outcome.

So the battle was arranged for the following morning—and to the victor belonged the spoils. It was to be by rounds to a finish.

Mid-afternoon, while Dynamite and his melancholy manager were enjoying their regular siesta, they were aroused by a loud commotion in the street outside their hut. The din increased; countless native feet pattered past the open doorway; voices gabbled excitedly in the native tongue; something unusual was happening, for this was the customary slumber hour in Kiyourrani.

Lew Ammon sat on the edge of his bunk and shivered. Across his brain flashed the thought that Weequa had stirred up a tribal revolt. Suppose the big black buck had decided to settle the fight before it happened by putting his white rival, and perhaps his rival's white friend, out of the way? Suppose—

"Wot's all th' row about?" mumbled Dynamite Breen sleepily.

Trembling like a leaf in an autumn wind Ammon struggled to his feet and made a rather uncertain voyage to the door. "Dynamite, come outside—quick!" he yelled from the entrance a moment later.

The blinding sunlight set the fighter to blinking when he emerged. Lew tugged frantically at his arm, pointed seaward, then went off into a delirious buck and wing dance down the street. A steamer—a bare two miles offshore—was headed directly for the island.

Shouting and pounding each other on the backs the two white men joined the surging mob of natives and raced down the beach to the water's edge. From here they watched the boat heave-to and cast anchor a safe distance out. They could hear the davits creak as a small boat was lowered over the side and—after what seemed hours—it beached and the crew began unloading two huge metal drums it carried.

"Have you got any smoking tobacco?" Lew Ammon asked the staring mate.

"Or a hunk of good ol' apple pie in your pocket?" grinned Dynamite Breen.

III.

A DENSE, packed circle of black figures squatted on the beach about the roped arena in which the fight between Dynamite Breen, well-known American middleweight, and Weequa, the Kiyourranian rib cracker, was to take place. His royal majesty, King Lukino, occupied a ringside seat and beamed amiably up at the waiting fighters, uttering an occasional genial "Hot-dam!" to the joy of officers and crew of the steamer Victor who were grouped expectantly about the ring as guests of the management.

The Victor's skipper, being young, and British, and consequently a bit of a sportsman, had not only decided to stay over to see the battle, but had provided a regulation set of five ounce gloves for the fray. His ship, Sidney, bound from Frisco, had put in at the island to deliver six huge casks of gasoline on order for the Allstar Motion Pictures Corporation of America. Apparently this company was not ungrateful for past favors, nor had it forgotten that both the electric light plant and the flivver they had left some months before would continue to require fuel.

Ammon had argued half the night with his obstinate friend to no avail. Dynamite Breen not only insisted upon the fight taking place, but had decided, now that they were going to leave the island, to take the girl with him.

"She's real class, I tell you," he insisted stubbornly. "She ain't half as brown as a lot of these here Coney Island beach bounds—an', say, boy, wait till Mrs. Dynamite Breen steps out in some real clothes. Hot-dam! as his nibs says, they'll have to call out th' reserves to keep back the crowd."

Ammon wept real tears. A wife, brown or white, was, in his estimation, not only a liability, but a disturber and a troublemaker in the life of a fighter—especially a pork and beaner who was still a long way from the real money. Then, too, Ammon real-

ized that this was merely a temporary infatuation. This type of woman, he knew, was not fitted for civilization—and Breen would soon tire of her. He was concerned, in a way, for the girl—but mostly for his own future as Dynamite's manager.

"Suppose the big black buck smacks you for the count?" he suggested desperately.

Dynamite guffawed loudly. "Fat chance of that big tar baby smackin' me for anything," he sneered. "Why, I'll feint him into a knot, bang him around for a couple of frames, an' then push him over. An' when I push 'em over they lay there."

So here they were—Dynamite Breen in one corner of the ring, Weequa in another—waiting for the gong to start the fireworks. Moyo, the fickle cause of the row, occupied a seat of honor near his majesty. She was clad in her Sabbath raiment, consisting mostly of beads, and it was plain that she favored the white warrior. Her devoted, fawnlike eyes never left his face as he grinned and nodded to her and exchanged banter with the English sailors.

Lew Ammon, who was adjusting the genuine boxing gloves to Weequa's hamlike hands, couldn't help feeling a tinge of pity for the girl as he watched her glowing face out of the corners of his eyes. She was due for bitter disappointment if the black man won, and complete disillusionment, and an uncertain fate, if her pale warrior was victorious.

The fighters were ready. The gong—in the hands of the first mate of the Victor—clanged noisily, and the men sprang from their corners. They sparred for a moment, the white man grinning confidently, the other scowling viciously. Dynamite landed the first blow—a light swing to his opponent's neck, and followed it with two swift jabs to the mouth. He danced away, laughing at the big fellow's clumsy efforts to hit him. The round was all Breen's. He feinted, upper-cut, jabbed and swung to his heart's content; darting in and out like a phantom he completely bewildered the black man with his speed and skill. Weequa didn't land a blow during the entire three minutes.

"At's the cookie, ol' bean!" applauded an enthusiastic cockney sailor. "Hanother

bob on the Hamerican in four rounds!" he challenged down the line.

"Hi'll tike it!" came an answering voice. "E'll knock the black un over hall right—but 'e'll not wear 'im down in four round."

"Better hang onto your jack, Buckie," Dynamite advised the last speaker from his corner. "I'll give this baby just one an' a half more frames."

Lew Ammon, who was refereeing the bout, leaned over and spoke to Dynamite's ear. "Watch out for that right hand of his," he advised. "It 'll be curtains if it ever connects."

"You watch yourself, grandma," the other suggested, smacking his gloves together and grinning. "Don't let him bite or do any kickin' with them dogs of his—that's all you gotta do. I'll do the rest."

At the clang of the gong for the second round the white man dashed out to make short work of the battle. He fairly rained leather against the big black's ribs and body, then suddenly shifted his attack to the head. The other reeled and staggered under the assault. He attempted to cover and in a crude way succeeded, but the slashing American once more shifted and drove punch after punch with lightning rapidity into the broad, black midriff. So intent was Dynamite in pursuing this onslaught he neglected even rudimentary precautions against a return blow from the grunting, heaving, human punching bag before him.

No one among the excited spectators knew exactly how the blow was delivered, or how far it traveled, but suddenly—out of the mêlée of thudding gloves—flashed a black streak. There came a crack which could have been heard on the deck of the Victor a half mile offshore, providing there had been any one there to hear it, and Dynamite Breen crashed to the floor like a stricken ox. And lay there.

IV.

It was evening. The steamer Victor—San Francisco to Sydney—plowed through placid seas in the mellow light from a tropical moon. Two men occupied chairs on the afterdeck; one wore a broad, white bandage about his head and frowned and scowled,

the other, smaller and a trifle—ah—more handsome, gazed placidly out over the shimmering water and puffed upon a cigar.

"Gad, that black boy packs a wallop!" muttered the scowling figure, gingerly touching the band upon his forehead.

"I warned you about that right hand of his, Dynamite," Lew Ammon retorted earnestly.

The other grunted, swore unintelligently and sprawled back in his chair with a heavy sigh.

Ammon puffed for a time in silence. Then he rose to his feet. "Just thought of something," he remarked to his companion. A rasping buzz, followed by a long-drawn wheeze which sounded like the intake of a single cylinder gas engine, was his only reply. Dynamite Breen was working at the task he loved best—sleeping.

Proceeding forward Ammon entered the cabin which had been assigned to the Victor's recently acquired passengers. Here, in the darkened interior, he fumbled for a bit under the berth and brought forth four sticky, sweat-streaked boxing gloves. Pawing them gently he ran a hand inside one and smiled as he produced a curved, metallic object. It was a horseshoe, and un-

til that morning it had hung above the low doorway of the Hotel Astor in the island village of Kiwyourrani—placed there, no doubt, by a member of the departed film company.

Slipping it in the pocket of his new jacket, generously provided by the skipper of the Victor, Lew took up the four gloves and strolled out on the deck. He spied the mate, leaning dreamily against the rail, and approached him.

"Here," said Lew, proffering the gloves, "these belong to the captain or some of the boys. I corralled 'em right after the fight, but in the excitement I forgot to return 'em."

"Thanks," drawled the officer, accepting the burden and sauntering aft at a leisurely pace.

Alone by the rail Lew Ammon drew the horseshoe from his pocket, held it for a second in the light of the moon, then planted a kiss squarely upon its curved end and tossed it overboard. A gentle splash and a small series of concentric circles marked its exit in the water below.

"Anyway," muttered Lew, turning from the rail, "my conscience is clear. I warned him."

THE END

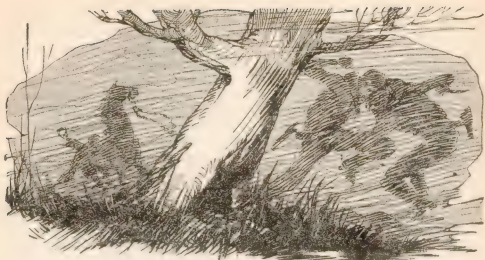
THE UNCERTAIN GUEST

WHEN Love will come,
Or whence he comes,
Or how long he will stay—
And whether he'll be warm enough
Or whether grave or gay—

How Love will come,
Or where he comes,
Or what Love first will say—
And whether he'll be true enough
And means his debts to pay—

What Love will bring
Or what he'll take—
Be all this as it may,
If he but comes
And does not choose
Some day when I'm away.

Marie Lee Warner.



In the Event of Death

By LAURIE YORK ERSKINE

Author of "The Laughing Rider," "The Confidence Man," etc.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A WOMAN UNAFRAID.

"I KNOW you were up late last night, Lederer," Cosgrove began, "so I'm going to let you off easily. I want you to tell the jury just how you came to be a part owner of the Bar Nothing ranch!"

The words, spoken in the silken accents wherewith a man addresses his fellow in politest conversation, struck the court room with a definite shock. Farley, sitting back in his chair, conscious now that bluster could do no good, protested to Creevy.

"That ain't relevant," he snarled.

"Shut him up!"

"I object!" said Creevy.

"You mean that reference to Farley's

will is only to be made by the prosecution?" smiled Cosgrove.

"Objection overruled," decided his honor, who was grievously at a loss, the reins of office having seemingly slipped from his fingers.

"Go ahead," urged Cosgrove.

"Mason Farley made me coheir in his will," Lederer replied; and he spoke with a hang-dog air.

"Were you present when that will was drawn up?"

"No."

Cosgrove grinned, and fingered the papers in his hand.

"Do you know what perjury means?" he asked; and he used the same intonation with which he had made that inquiry of the discredited cow-puncher.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 28.

Lederer rose to the bluff. "I mean yes," he snapped. "Sure I was there when they made it."

"Who else was there?"

"Klien and Wert and Mason—"

"Shut up!" roared Farley.

"And together you persuaded, coerced, and bullied Mason Farley into disowning his daughter and making you joint heirs?" Cosgrove pressed his question home with the force of a lance thrust.

"No!" shouted Lederer. "We didn't bully him. We said we'd see Hazel married—"

"Shut up!" roared Farley. "You—"

"That's enough!" cried Cosgrove. "In short, gentlemen of the jury, that will was framed among these men to cheat a girl out of her inheritance. I think the attitude with which Farley and Lederer have treated my questions speaks for itself. Now, there's just one more matter I want to get from you, Lederer. It's about that shooting we enjoyed together. You say your gun had blanks in it."

"Yes." Lederer ground out the word with lowered eyes.

"When did I put those blank cartridges in?"

"When you took my gun."

"Do you want to admit now that you are mistaken about my taking your gun—or do you want me to put John Gaines on the stand to refresh your memory?"

There came a deathly silence to the room—a silence of jury and court, and especially a pregnant silence on the part of the witness.

"Answer that question!" thundered Cosgrove.

"I remember now," growled Lederer.

"You didn't take my gun."

"All right; stand down! Unless"—Cosgrove turned again to Creevy—"the attorney for the people wishes to cross-examine."

But he didn't. Creevy had no desire to cross-examine Lederer; and even if he had, it is problematical if he would have had the chance, for Lederer was out of the witness box before Cosgrove's amiable offer had left his lips.

In another moment Lederer was out of

the courthouse. With panic driving him, he was out and away—away for any place that would still in his shaken heart the torturing fear that the mob which the conspirators had so painstakingly sought to turn against Cosgrove would soon be upon his heels. For he knew the men of Manford, and he knew the summary justice which they were wont to mete out to those they condemned.

He had felt them turn against him as Cosgrove had so gallantly swung into defense. He had sensed it and seen it as he sat in the witness box. Silently, ominously, he had felt the tide of rough range justice turn against him and condemn him. That knowledge engendered in him a fear which gave him wings, feverish wings which bore him away, fast galloping, in a fear that fed upon the frenzied beating of his pony's hoofs.

Before Cosgrove had well begun to continue his defense and rend the tissue of lies that had well-nigh brought him to death, Lederer was a panicky fugitive from the very wrath through which he had confidently and skillfully endeavored to remove Cosgrove from his path.

His going left Farley frantic, too. Made of more determined stuff than either of his confederates, and more deeply confident of his influence over the crowd, Farley was still fighting, but he was fighting desperately.

"You can make what you like out of his lies an' his trickery," he cried to judge, jury, and all who heard his voice, "but you can't get out of the fact that he shot down Klien! He can't lie out of that! His own words convict him of that. Even Gaines says Jake was unarmed."

He stopped, for, his throat suddenly drying, he choked, his voice catching in an odd, despairing manner. And he found himself suddenly enveloped in a deadly silence.

"Which side are you representing?" asked Cosgrove dryly.

"Your honor!" Creevy exclaimed, suddenly arising. "I move that the defendant be ordered to continue his defense or close it. With all his spectacular bluff he hasn't produced a single fact to show him innocent of the original charge. Wert Farley

may be out of order, but he's damned right! Cosgrove has still got to prove he didn't murder Jacob Klien!"

And that was his honor's chance. While the court room still hung on the sound of the prosecuting attorney's voice, Judge Fairlove saw his opportunity to take to himself something of the limelight which had beat so pitilessly upon every other being at the trial but him.

"Young feller," he boomed, and leaned far forward in his chair, "Ben Creevy talks sense. What more defense have you got to offer to this court?"

Cosgrove then experienced that moment of hesitation which must come to the gambler who possesses but one trump and knows that the game depends on when that trump is played. For he was now faced by the predicament which had occupied him through all the days since his arrest—a predicament which he had hoped to ameliorate by moving the court and jury with the picture he had drawn of his probity and unassailable character.

The fact was that Klien had died by a bullet from his gun, and there was only one person whom he could call to witness that he had fired in self-defense. He had known from the beginning that this was so, and had assailed himself often with the question of what in this dilemma he would do. Would he call her to testify for him?

Would he be capable of placing her upon that platform and subjecting her to the inquisition which she would surely have to bear from Creevy, whatever testimony she gave to the questions he would put? The question had tormented him throughout the trial, and now, as he was brought to the test, he knew that he could not go ahead.

The hot pain which had seared him when Creevy had dragged her name so iniquitously into the evidence before, now recurred to him. To place her in the box would be to subject her to a publicity tenfold as infamous. All her most secret thoughts and delicate feelings would be paraded in the limelight of the calumny which Creevy would pour upon her with his cross-examination.

The one matter of her strained relations

with her father, the union with Lederer upon which Mason Farley had insisted—Cosgrove winced as he recollected how she had shrank from the remembrance of it. "It was shameful!" she had cried. And Creevy would endeavor to show that she had plotted to gain her father's fortune through his murder.

These thoughts flashed through Cosgrove's mind as he was confronted with the demand for quick action. His defense so swiftly begun, so dexterously pursued, must be continued without a halt. Up to this point he had not failed to touch home with each thrust of his blade. But on this, the most vital issue of his defense, he paused, he wavered. He appeared for the first time at a loss.

Watching him, Hazel Farley's heart fell. She had followed this case in silence, but she had followed it with her soul. With her heart near to bursting as the case had gone against him, she had watched the mob rise to the lash of Creevy's tactics with the determination to throw herself between it and the man she loved if his life fell into the balance.

When the perilous moment came she had whipped a gun from the holster at Gaines's side and leaped to her place beside him; and she had known that no small part of the spell which had halted that mob was due to her presence at his side.

When she had seen the reins once more in Cosgrove's hands, launched on that admirable attack which was his defense, she had settled back in her chair with the sure knowledge that all was over save the formalities of victory. She had followed his splendid sword play with exhilaration, sweeping onward in her heart as he swept onward to triumph. And now she saw him falter, waver; with a cold constriction of her heart she saw him, in the most critical moment of defense, perceptibly pull up.

He swept the court room with his eyes as though seeking aid from the empty air. There was a second when his gaze alighted upon hers and he saw agony there. Then, afraid lest she divine that she was the cause of his hesitation, he swung with his surprise attack upon the judge.

"Mr. Creevy has come to life," he said;

"but it's obvious that he has come to life only at the demand of his star witness. His star witness might be mistaken for his client, if a prosecuting attorney could have a client. It would be interesting to inquire into the peculiar relations between Mr. Creevy and that witness; but it would be beside the point. The point is, says Mr. Creevy, that I must prove Klien had no gun when he was shot. I must prove that I killed him in self-defense."

"Yo're damned right, you gotta prove it!" snarled Farley.

"Well, *have* I?" Cosgrove hurled this startling demand into the face of the astonished judge with a cry that to Hazel Farley had in it the horrifying suggestion of despair. "Consider the evidence I have given you, your honor. Consider, gentlemen of the jury, the testimony I have elicited from the witnesses you have heard. I have proven that the prosecution is actuated by some desperate motive which makes Wert Farley and Cliff Lederer willing to kidnap me to keep me out of this court and prejudice you against me. I have proven that the prosecuting attorney himself appears to be more like the hired attorney of Lederer and Farley than the attorney for the people.

"I have proven that these men are crooked, and all their efforts to discredit me have, only resulted in their own discredit. I have proven to you all that I stand before you as a citizen and a native of this place; that I have held my own in fair fight against unfair opponents; that they have brought hired assassins to betray me, and that I have never needed to use foul means to overcome them.

"In face of that is there need for me to go further? Does it seem to you that with everything to gain by using fair means, as I have proved I am capable of using, I should stain my hands or my reputation by using foul? Does it seem to you that the kind of man who would take on Cliff Lederer, who admits he is quick with his gun in fair fight, would shoot another man unarmed?"

He paused a moment, permitting his logic to sink home.

"If it comes to that," he cried, "I need

never have come back to this place! I could have made my way in the world at any place where fortune took me. Here in Manford I knew there were enemies. I knew that the most dangerous of men, who, having always hated my father, would surely carry on their feud against the son, were only waiting for my return. I knew that to return here would be to risk my life, and yet I returned.

"I returned because it is my home; and I returned at the call of one who needed help. Was that the deed of a coward? Was that the action of a murderer. And more. I can tell you this, because to conceal it would be to conceal the most potent argument against such a rash folly as this of which I'm accused. Gentlemen, when this trial is over I expect to become the happiest man in the world. There is one woman who is the finest and bravest and most desirable of all God's creatures. When this trial is over I am going to marry that woman; and it has been my intention to marry her since long before the morning when Klien died.

"Now I ask you, gentlemen—I ask you, your honor—would a man with the greatest hour of his life before him, a man planning to take unto himself the only girl in the world and with her make a home in his native country, would such a man jeopardize that sacred future by committing murder? Would the punishment of the most black-hearted scoundrel in the world justify such a man sticking his head in a noose?"

He put the question with a hot, passionate energy that challenged high heaven to deny him. And Farley did.

"Fireworks!" he bellowed. "That ain't evidence. You can't prove a damn thing with words!"

"No!" cried Cosgrove, whirling upon Farley. "No! Not words! Calumny! Slander! The desecration of everything innocent, decent, and pure! That's what you would have!

"Gentlemen of the jury, place yourselves in my position. If you possessed the sacred confidence and love and devotion of a woman whom you expected to make your wife, would you not protect that sacred

trust from the slurs of a scurrilous tongue, even if by doing so you risked your very life?"

He was before the jury box as he spoke with his arms a little spread, his blue eyes blazing. And his voice suddenly dropped low.

"I must ask you to take the fact that I shot Klien in self-defense on trust!" he said. "Gentlemen, the defense rests."

"No! No! What are you saying? The chief witness for the defense has not been heard!"

And Hazel Farley had flung herself forward to the jury box, where she stood with her hands tightly grasping the rail and her brown eyes glowing with the vehemence of her spirit.

For with Cosgrove's last words she had found the answer to the enigma of his hesitation. He had embarked upon that desperate, astounding address to the jury for no other purpose than to save her from the ordeal of the witness stand, and he had done it because he loved her.

"Before the defense rests," she cried, "my testimony must be heard. *I saw Klien fire his gun!*"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LETHAL WEAPON.

H AZEL FARLEY sat in the witness box, a vivacious figure of Nemesis enthroned, and lacerated the soul of Wert Farley. The legal tables were reversed, and it now was Bradley Cosgrove who endeavored to elicit from this witness only enough to throw the cause of justice to his side and to close the case before Ben Creevy could obtain an opportunity for inquisition. Cosgrove was determined, as a hunted animal at bay is determined to live, that the attorney for the people should never be permitted to subject this witness to the infamous cross-examination which he knew Farley would urge Creevy to pursue.

As he questioned her he felt a singular sensation of guilt. She was supremely alert, eager to help him, to couch her testimony in words that would tell in his behalf. She

seemed almost to quiver with eagerness to give him all that was in her of truth to save his cause. And yet Cosgrove felt somehow unworthy.

She appeared so small and young and peculiarly delicate of build and complexion in her eager, shimmering aspect. He felt as if he played upon a harp with clumsy fingers; he felt as though he violated a sacred trust. It seemed intolerable that she should be set up before all the world thus to be questioned, to bear witness in a case which included such offscourings of humanity as Lederer and Farley.

This ordeal seemed somehow to bring her into touch with them, and Cosgrove resented it. He resented the circumstances which appointed him the hand which was to pluck at this delicate instrument. And he could not dispassionately look upon her as she sat there.

But Hazel knew what witness she could bear, and she was untroubled. She had taken the stand to save the man she loved, and she gave her testimony convincingly.

When Cosgrove asked her to outline the circumstances under which her father made his will, and at the same time assured her that she need make no reference to her own position in the matter, she smiled appreciatively and threw light into a corner of the evidence which had until now remained in shadow.

"I'm convinced," she declared spiritedly, "that my uncle, Klien, and Lederer deliberately aroused my father against me and then played on his anger to dictate the terms of that will."

"She sent for him!" yelled Farley at this point. "She sent for him! You don't expect she'd tell the truth, do you?"

"There isn't a man here who knew my father who won't understand what I mean," responded the girl. And the court room applauded the spirit with which she turned upon her assailant.

She did more, too. She carried her narrative through the delicate maze of incidents, wranglings, bitter, unnatural scenes which had preceded her writing to Cosgrove. And she told of Cosgrove's coming to see her on that fatal night when her father had died.

She gave her answers in a manner which made a consecutive narrative out of the articulated replies, that seemed to ignore the interruptions of the questions which brought it forth. It was a narrative filled with an interest that gripped the mind and heart. It was as though she told some old, absorbing story of intrigue and elemental passion, of bitter hates and grasping avarice.

And while she told her story she gave great expression to it with her wide brown eyes, with the passing frowns and smiles of her finely marked brows, with the haunting curl of her lips or the sudden droop of them. The emotions of her story passed across her face in moving pageantry. Bright resolution was there—anger, sorrow, then sparkling humor, or acid satire. She in turn whipped her persecutors with fine scorn, or lashed them with a laughing mockery. Unconsciously all the court room was on edge, straining to catch each word from her lips, totally won by the magnetism of her passionate crusade.

And Farley saw the terrific damage which she did his cause. He writhed with desperation as he literally felt, with the sting of a lash, the points she made against him. He heard her accuse him, and make good her accusation, of fraud and conspiracy. He flamed up at that, but even in his desperation he perceived that his outburst did his cause more harm than good. So he subsided into a sullen resolve to hold his protests for the inevitable moment when her narrative would bring this testimony to the moment of Klien's death. It was then that he must fight, and fight with the knowledge that she knew nothing she could prove. He would hold his fire until that moment came.

Cosgrove built up to it carefully. He knew that he must leave no loophole which would permit Creevy to attack her testimony. To protect her from cross-examination he must cover every point which led up to that fatal moment. And he did. He halted her narrative again and again. He questioned and cross-questioned her. He even picked her up on one or two small points, causing her to correct herself, and then nailed down that correction so that

there could be no doubt. And she opened her eyes at that, wondering at the sharpness with which he fired his questions as he drew her painfully through the morning of the gun play with Lederer, through the will reading itself, through a detailed description of how and where all present sat, and what they said.

"Yes, yes, I know that we had words!" he cried. "But what did we say? You say that Klien was insulting, but how insulting? You say I answered him, but how?"

"I can't tell you," she replied, bewildered by the acid of his tone. "How can I tell you what you said?"

"Why not?"

"Because I did not hear!"

Cosgrove looked at her in blank amazement. The court room fell into a sudden hush. Judge Fairlove stared at the girl, bewildered.

"You—did—not—hear?" he grunted.

Farley saw suddenly a gleam of hope. This fitted into the accusation that Cosgrove and Klien had quarreled over her good name.

"Didn't hear!" he barked. "Huh! Why not? Was you struck deaf?"

"No!" she cried. "I didn't hear, because I was looking at Klien's gun."

"Klien's gun!" It was a man's voice hoarsely shouting in surprise; it was the voice of Slade, on his feet and leaning over the jury rail in his amazement.

And the cry went around the court room: "Klien's gun!"

"That's a damned lie!" bellowed Farley.

"Where did you see Klien's gun?" demanded Cosgrove.

"He had it in his hand, hidden behind a cushion on the window seat. I saw it there, and knew he had you covered. How could I hear what you said? How could I hear anything else save the sound of that gun, as I saw it explode, in my fancy? Oh, my darling, I was afraid then! I was afraid! Afraid!"

She had lost all consciousness of the crowd which hedged them about. She had forgotten that she bore witness before the court. Living again that terrible moment when she had seen that dear life threat-

ened, she forgot everything save that she was talking face to face with the man she loved.

The crowd in the court room knew in that moment that Cosgrove had fired in self-defense. No further evidence was necessary. But no voice interrupted now the procedure of the trial; for it held them bound with a spell they could not break.

Here before their eyes was young love yearning toward its mate, and in the strange words they spoke those two courted each the other as certainly as ever *Romeo* and *Juliet* courted in medieval Verona. Seemingly lost in their love to all the world, they spoke mechanically the words of their defense.

"He held the gun in his hand? Covering me? And you saw it—clearly?" he was saying; but his eyes burned with an emotion which words had never yet been able to express.

"As clearly as I see you now! And I shall never forget that gun! I saw him cover you with it, and I saw him fire!"

"She lies! It's a frame-up!"

The harsh voice of Farley, strained almost to cracking, broke the spell which held all the room in thrall. Cosgrove wheeled upon him like a whirlwind. "Farley," he cried, "you have challenged the good faith of every witness who has so far said a word in my defense. By Heaven, it looks as though it is you who stands on trial, instead of me!"

The crowd arose to that, arose with a rustle, a murmur which was applause. But Cosgrove silenced it with a peculiar appeal, a glance toward them which, without a word or gesture, stilled the disturbance.

"But here's one witness whom you cannot call a liar! I tell you that you've used that expression for the last time in this trial! Hereafter you will keep your blasphemous mouth shut, or face the consequences."

But Farley, it seemed, was mad. He strode forward to the opposite side of the table against which Cosgrove stood and, leaning far forward across it, he glared with insensate fury into the young man's face.

"I say it—and I say it again! You can't stop me! There ain't no power on earth can stop me! She lies! Anybody lies who says that Jake Klien had a gun! *Get back!*"

He screamed the last words out with a lurid curse, for Cosgrove vaulted the table as clear as a bird and in an instant was beside him. As Cosgrove landed lightly at his side Farley, with a scream of rage, stepped backward a short pace and his hand flew to his hip.

There was a vast clamor in the court room, shrieks and cursing. Several men leaped forward, and Hazel, in the witness stand, stood suddenly erect. But Gaines, the sheriff, and a dozen others beat Farley to the draw with the weight of their bodies flung forward upon him.

They wrested the gun from his hand, and Cosgrove, seizing it, flung it on the table. "And there," he cried, as he too drew a gun, flinging it beside the other, "is mine! Let there be no mistake about the equality of arms!"

Amid all the uproar his honor had manfully slammed his book again and again upon the desk.

"This trial ain't runnin' right!" he roared as the clamor died away. "We got to have order here, or we'll shut up this trial! Now, Chris, you watch them guns, and if any other man in this court room throws a gun again I'll put him in the cooler. Go on with yore defense, young feller!"

Farley, pulled down to his chair, and conscious that the men on either side of him constituted a guard against further violence, fumed in an agony of baffled rage. "Don't listen!" he bellowed. "Don't hear them! They lie! They lie!"

Ignoring him, Cosgrove proceeded with his questions, and Hazel, flushed with the agitation of that moment, answered him in a voice that was quavering and low.

"Please repeat that question," asked Slade, for the outburst of Farley had drowned her low voice out.

"Shut up, Wert!" commanded his honor.

"I said, 'Could you identify that gun if you saw it again?'" repeated Cosgrove. And he saw her gaze pass him as it rest-

ed with glistening excitement upon the table.

"Yes!" she cried. "Yes!" And he knew that she sought to convey to him something with her eyes.

"I object!" cried Creevy, sensing a collusion. "That's a leading question."

"All right, then!" Cosgrove did not wait for his honor's decision; for he had caught the meaning of her glance. "I'll put the question in a different way!"

He swung about, still facing the jury, and pointed dramatically to the weapons which lay upon the table.

"Is the gun you saw Klien use on that table?" he demanded.

"Gawd!" shrieked Farley, and plunged forward, almost making the table before Gaines brought him up short with an iron grip.

"Yes!" cried Hazel, and she leaned over the witness rail. "*That is the gun!*"

"I object!" cried Creevy.

"Shut her up!" roared Farley.

"Is it this one?" demanded Cosgrove; and his voice boomed loud above the others. He held up his own weapon!"

"No," she answered.

"Is it this?" And he held up Farley's.

"Yes! I recognize it by the red stain which runs down the barrel."

"She lies!" roared Farley. And this time his voice arose in such a blast of fury that the court room had to hear him. "That gun is mine! I was carrying it myself that morning! I've carried it for years!"

"Prove it!" snapped Cosgrove.

And Farley, who had expected opposition to his voice, but no such recognition, faltered, nonplused.

"How can I?" he snarled. "One gun's like another. My brother Mase gave me that gun four, five years ago. I've always carried it. *Prove it ain't mine!*" And he laughed hideously.

"The red marking on it!" cried Hazel. "I saw it in Klien's hand!"

"That mark's been on it ever since I had it! It's mine!" roared Farley; and he would have snatched it up, but Gaines was before him. He himself took the gun from Cosgrove's hand.

"Just a minute, Wert!" he boomed

firmly, and, scrutinizing the weapon closely, he at the same time presented it toward the infuriated man. "You say this gun is yours?"

"*I know it's mine!*" Farley glared hatefully at this new opponent.

"And you've carried it for years?"

There was a meaning in the old plainman's voice which puzzled all the court, holding them breathless.

"Ever since I got it!" Farley shouted.

"You were carrying it when your brother was killed?" Gaines demanded.

Farley glared at him with the fury of one who sees an approaching doom.

"Of course," he growled.

"Then, God help you, you're your brother's murderer!" cried Gaines. "I picked up this gun in the barn doorway the night Mason Farley was killed! I tell you it's the gun of the murderer!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN UNBEARABLE PITY.

FOR a moment there was a great and terrible silence which seemed to pulsate with the passing of the seconds. Wert Farley stood as if turned to stone by the awful charge that John Gaines had pronounced.

And Gaines himself appeared dazed by his discovery. He stood with the gun in his hand and stared at Farley as though he had discovered him stricken with leprosy. It was Cosgrove who leaped into the breach, forestalling the pent fury of the mob.

"What do you mean, Gaines? Speak! Quick! What are you talking about? He seized the old man by the shoulder and shook him roughly, arousing him as he would have aroused a sleeping man.

Gaines, still clutching the gun in his hand, still with his horrified eyes on the spellbound Farley, responded in a deep, but colorless voice.

"This gun killed Mason Farley," he said. "I know it, and Chris Christofferson knows it. I went out to the Bar Nothing ranch with Chris when Hazel called up, saying her father had been killed. Mason was lying

on his face, just as he had been found. The girl saw to that. She saw that the body was not touched.

"And we went over the ground. Inside the door of the barn we found that gun with two cartridges exploded. It had been thrown there after the murder. I found the gun, and after the bullets were taken out of Farley's body, I found they fitted it. I turned the gun over to Chris, who will remember it as clearly as I do.

"Two days later it was gone; stolen out of his desk. Some one had cut out the lock. Chris and I agreed to keep silent on it, trusting the murderer to betray himself by showing us the gun. And now Wert claims it is his."

The old man stopped short and his head sunk upon his breast. Farley glared at him with his jaw dropping and a dazed glitter in his eyes.

"Is this so, Christofferson?" Cosgrove's voice cracked the silence.

"Shore!" Chris answered vehemently. "True as gospel!"

"Why, Brad, you remember when you showed me your gun!" cried Gaines. "I said they could never pin Farley's death on you—because I knew the gun that did it!"

Cosgrove took the gun from his hand and held it toward Farley.

"Your gun?" he asked quietly.

Farley stared at him for a moment, and then went suddenly and horribly to pieces. He plunged forward and grasped Cosgrove by his arms, hanging to him, pleading with him.

"No!" he shrieked. "Not mine! Before God, not mine!"

Fearing he was about to do Cosgrove violence, they tore him away and in the arms of the men he struggled, raving.

"Klien killed him!" he shouted. "It was Klien. His gun! I took it from him when he dropped, and hid it in the floor! Lederer will tell you! Slade, he'll tell you! He found me pokin' about the board that was loose! I took it and hid it so's to have evidence against Cosgrove! It was Klien shot my brother Mase!"

"Not me! Not me! I swear it! My God, I swear to my soul it wasn't me! I

didn't know nothing about it till this minute. Klien must have wanted to see that will work out too soon! He couldn't wait! Don't you see? Can't you see? Won't you believe what I say?"

He mouthed and shrieked his confession and his plea, sweeping the court room with his imploring gaze, seeking for one compassionate face among all those silent, grim countenances. Only one pitying glance he sought, and he found it in his niece. She came down from the witness stand, and approached him in compassion.

"Yes," she said softly. "We hear you. We believe you."

But with an inarticulate cry he flung himself away from her and stumbled blindly toward the door. He could not bear her sympathy. He had found the pity he desired, and he could not stand it.

As if fascinated, they watched him blunder forth, like a drunken man. Saw him feel his way through the doorway as though blind. And they did not stop him; not a soul in the court room suggested holding him. They let him depart, for even subconsciously every one there divined that there was another matter which must be concluded before all else.

When the door closed behind the shattered genius of the prosecution, Cosgrove again forestalled the crowd.

"Your honor!" he cried with his clear, ringing voice. "Gentlemen of the jury! The defense rests its case. We rest upon a plea of self defense!"

Again he had pronounced the unexpected, and, having given his case to the jury, he turned, and leading Hazel Farley to a seat, flung himself down in a chair beside her. But his honor was not equal to this situation. Having long since lost the reins of his office, he could not thus peremptorily regain them. After a moment of stupid silence, he turned to Creevy.

"What d' you do now?" he mumbled.

"Turn it over to the jury," said Creevy hastily, and thus washed his hands of the unclean case he had handled.

His honor turned with dignity to Slade.

"You heard the trial," he pronounced portentously. "What do you say? Guilty or not guilty?"

Slade grinned, a tight and grim humor in his eye.

"I reckon I speak the sentiments of this jury," he said, "when I say not guilty!"

He turned to his colleagues.

"Is them yore sentiments?" he demanded.

And the eleven men responded vehemently.

"Aye!"

"Ayes have it!" bellowed his honor.

"Young feller, yo're acquitted!"

And the first trial for murder to be held in Manford County had come to its fantastic end.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

UNMERITED MERCY.

THE voice of his honor the judge was lost in the thunderous roar with which the surging court room announced its approval of the verdict. The mob which had that afternoon demanded nothing short of Cosgrove's life, now fell into a frenzy of acclaim that he had won his freedom. Roar after roar shook the court house. The crowd shrieked and whistled and yelled and hooted in its fervor. And the mad celebration did not cease until a raucous voice boomed out the menace which the mob contained.

"And what happens to them skunks at the Bar Nothing?" roared that voice.

"String them up!" came the response, and it was lost in a thunder of assent.

Cosgrove knew well the tenor of that cry, and leaped to stifle it.

"Wait!" he cried. "The sheriff has something to say!"

And then to Christofferson.

"Hold every man in this court room until I get a start!" he murmured. "Hold 'em at the point of your rifles! I'll take Slade and Gaines, and get out to the Bar Nothing first. We'll put Lederer and Farley under arrest and then God help the man who tries to take 'em! You come out and join us when you can."

"What is it?" roared the mob. "What is it, Christofferson?"

Their cry was a jeer, for the mob, feeling

its own strength, felt disposed to play for a moment with this sheriff.

"What is it, Chris? Hurry up with yore sermon, Chris!" they yelled.

And Christofferson, after a hurried order to his men, gave it them.

"There ain't goin' to be no lynchin', boys," he said.

"Why not? Oh, there ain't?" The mob jeered him.

"No!" snapped Chris firmly. "Because there ain't no man goin' to pass out of this court room till I say the word. And I say the word when you agree there ain't goin' to be no lynchin'." And when they turned like a rolling sea toward the doors, they found a group of rifles there to greet them. Christofferson had the court room bottled up.

Meanwhile, Cosgrove had forgathered with Slade and Gaines, who, in the huddle of men, court officers and deputies in the chambers of his honor, gravely listened to him and assented. Hazel was with them. She had not left Cosgrove's side since the dramatic moment in the court room when she had seen him vindicated by her testimony. He turned to her as they moved hurriedly toward the door.

"Good night," he murmured. "Will you wait for me to return? It should not be for long. Or better, go home, and I'll come to you."

But she laughed.

"I'm coming with you," she said.

He was quick and firm, however.

"No!" he cried. "Not to-night. It will be a man's work to-night. You can't come with me now!"

She protested, but he would not have it, and there was no time to be lost. And she had to be content. With a strange feeling of happiness which was not complete, she stood outside the courthouse and saw him drive away on the first business he had pursued in Manford without her at his side.

It was dark, for the trial had exhausted daylight. And Cosgrove had not slept for nearly forty hours. He had eaten no food during twelve of them save for a hurried bite before he had entered the court room.

Yet it was Slade who insisted upon a brief halt for nourishment before they drove out to the Bar Nothing with the consciousness of the teeming mob they had left behind them. It was a spur to Cosgrove's mind, a sharp irritant which urged him forward faster than the speeding car he drove, faster than the wind which, having arisen at sundown, now hummed through the coulees and filled the air with a whirling haze of dust.

His eyes, already smarting with the weariness which he renounced and overcame, were further irritated by that flying dust, and the fine particles of it filled his nostrils, choking him. The men in the rear of the car, lacking the screening expanse of the windshield, coughed and swore as the gale lashed their faces.

They arrived under the dark shadow of the high bank upon which stood the Bar Nothing ranch house in the full fury of the wind, and it seemed as though nature herself in this manner invested their coming with the blast of a retributive justice. Cosgrove brought the car to a stop under the bank.

"We'd best go up to the house on foot," he explained. "You, Gaines, can bring the car up after us, if you will. It wouldn't do for the mob to lay hands on it; and if we run it up the hill it will sound its own warning."

They held a brief conference there beside the car, and it was arranged that Cosgrove, Slade and Webb should ascend the roadway on foot, approach the house from each end, and have Farley and Lederer ready for delivery by the time the car reached the ranch house.

"If they ain't there?" said Slade.

"Where else?" Cosgrove's query seemed sufficient. The three men strode off together for the roadway.

It was a singular advance they made up that deep cut in the sandy bank; three figures blindly striding in a swirling chaos of wind-blown sand. The cut, from road to summit, was only a matter of thirty rods or so. In the fury of the gale it seemed five-fold that distance. But it served the purpose of covering their approach.

As he fought the gale, Cosgrove pon-

dered Slade's question. What if they were not there? What if the two remaining beneficiaries of that iniquitous testament had fled separately to refuges unknown? But where else could they be? What other stronghold would they choose more logically to make their stand against attack?

Slade and Webb had gone around to the rear. They had agreed to enter with no show of violence; their mission was to save and to protect, to capture these men for no other reason than to save them from mob violence. With this in his mind, Cosgrove threw open the door without the formality of knocking, and found himself face to face with Farley.

Cosgrove had expected Farley to greet him with rage and bluster. He had no illusions regarding the intensity of this man's enmity; but he was not prepared for the mask of passion which confronted him in the likeness of Farley's face. This baffled conspirator had obviously been pacing the room since his return from the courthouse, and the intensity with which he had flung himself into the prosecution, the bitter fury with which he had fought as he saw his vicious edifice crumble before Cosgrove's attack, the soul shaking horror of the revelation Gaines had made, all had left their mark upon his face.

He had ridden back to the ranch hardly conscious of the wind which whipped him as he rode, and he had paced this shabby room in a daze of shattered hopes for an eternity, stopping only now and then to feed with bad whisky the chaotic, impotent fury which raged in his brain. His face was unshaven since the day before. The lines from the nostrils to the corners of his mouth were deeply furrowed, and his eyes were mad and wild, red-rimmed and bleared by the fumes of the drink, bloodshot and like an animal's, ferocious.

This was the mask that confronted Cosgrove when he threw open the door of the Bar Nothing ranch, and it was startling close upon him, for Farley, in his morbid pacing had just reached the doorway when Cosgrove entered. At the unexpected sight of this visitor, he cringed backward.

"What d'ya want?" he snarled.

Cosgrove, who had stood for a second in

surprise at the sight of Farley, quickly composed himself.

"Is Lederer here?" he asked briskly. But the man still cringed backward, glaring at him.

"What d'ya want?" he cried. "What d'ya want here?"

Cosgrove frowned thoughtfully.

"I came to see Lederer," he said.

"He ain't here!" Farley suddenly burst out into a bitter stream of curses. "Ain't you done enough?" he screamed. "Ain't it enough that you lied us into the standin' of hunted animals?"

He pounced forward as an infuriated animal might, grasping Cosgrove by the breast of his coat, glaring up at him hatefully.

"*Get out o' this house! Out! Get away before I kill you with my hands!*" he raved, and his hold being broken from Cosgrove's coat he tried to grasp the young man's throat, but Cosgrove with a sharp blow sent him reeling across the room.

"I've come to take you in with me!" he said. "You and Lederer! Good God, you fool! Do you know where your blackguard ways have brought you? The mob's raving for your blood. Raving to hang you as you tried to inflame them to hang me! They're out for your blood, Farley, and a dozen rifles are holding them in the court room to give me the chance to take you!"

Farley's hands dropped at his sides, and his jaw drooped dismally.

"The mob?" he faltered. "Take me?"

Cosgrove whipped out the warrant which he held.

"Yes, take you!" he cried. "Your only chance is to give yourself up to the law. I've got a warrant here for you, and Slade and Webb are with me. If you and Lederer give yourselves up, I'll guarantee they'll never take you from our hands!"

Farley shrank away from him.

"Give up?" he cried. "By God, Cosgrove, you're playin' yore tricks again! Before I give myself up to you—"

As he spoke his frantic glance lit upon a chair, roughly made from heavy timbers, beside the door. He plunged for it.

"They'll never have me!" shrieked Farley as he whirled the ponderous weapon in his hands. "Nor you!" Cosgrove closed

with him, seeking to grasp the chair before it fell. As he did so the door burst open. Farley dropped the chair with a rasping cry, and leaped backward. He thought this was the mob.

But it was Slade and Webb. They seized Farley, holding him, and Cosgrove, somewhat disheveled, but unshaken, voiced the need for haste.

"If you'll give us a chance, you fool!" he cried, "we'll save your miserable life! That mob may be on us at any minute now! Your only hope lies in arrest."

"By what right?" raved Farley. "By what right do you arrest me?"

"It doesn't matter!" snapped Cosgrove. "Where's Lederer?"

Farley stared at him for a moment incredulously, then a gleam of the old time cunning crept into his bleared eyes.

"I don't know!" he growled.

Cosgrove jumped forward, grasping him by the slack of the coat.

"Where's Lederer?" he cried. "Tell me where he is!"

Farley grinned evilly.

"I tell yer I don't know!" he repeated.

Above the howl of the gale outside they heard the roar of the car as Gaines brought it up the cot.

"Quick!" snapped Cosgrove. "We've got to round him up, too!"

But Farley was obstinate. In the dull chaos of his mind he saw only that Lederer's absence foiled Cosgrove and baffled him. That was enough. He was incapable of analyzing the situation more finely than that. In Lederer's absence, Cosgrove was set back. It was a pitiful obstruction Farley thus placed in his way, but he desperately persisted in it.

"I tell you I don't know!" he screamed.

"You fool!" Cosgrove cried. "Listen to me! Try to clear your drink sodden brain and hear me! Your life depends on it! *Your life!* Do you hear?"

"That mob you brought to hang me is after you and Lederer! You brought them here and whipped them into a rage of violence! That mob has turned against you! It's out for *your* blood now! Can you hear that? Can you understand that?"

"Let go!" howled Farley, and cursed

Cosgrove until his voice choked in futile wrath.

"We've come to take you away. To put you in a safe place! To guard you from the mob! Save you from lynching!" roared Cosgrove. "But we must work fast! We must get you away! You and Lederer! We must get you away before the mob is upon us! Where is he? Where is Lederer hiding?"

Then Farley burst into laughter.

"Out in the mountains!" he shrieked. Out where you'll never get him. He'll be over the line and in White River by morning!"

Slade, who with Webb, had been holding Farley as a groom might hold a fractious horse, cursed gruffly.

"We want him!" he blurted out.

"We'll get him!" Cosgrove's voice was clear again with confidence.

"No, you won't" snarled Farley. "There's a trail to White River that you won't never follow with all yore trick driving. There ain't nothin' but a hawse can follow that trail, an' Cliff's got two of the pick o' the ranch. You can frame me an' hound me an' murder me, but there's one you won't get! There's one left to see the score's made even!"

Cosgrove strode to the door and opened it so that the room was invaded by a blast of wind.

"Get that man into the car!" he ordered.

"And it *will* be made even!" cursed Farley frantically as they dragged him to the door. Another blast of wind blew out the lamp light, and Farley's weird voice sounded from that darkness like the wail of an accursed thing. "He'll come back and pay you, Cosgrove! He'll pay you out an', by Gawd, you'll never live to fatten orf the killin' that you've made!"

They dragged him, protesting, through the door and down to the car. He entered it cursing, and Slade and Webb entered with him. But Cosgrove did not follow.

"Ride through the back trails!" he cried to Gaines. "Drive over the open prairie if you have to, but get him into the jail before that mob has a chance at him!"

"But you're comin', Brad?"

"No! I'm riding into the mountains.

When I come in, Lederer's coming with me!"

"There's no chance!" protested Gaines. "He's got the best horses and a three hour start!"

"But he doesn't know horses!" laughed Cosgrove. "I miss my bet if he hasn't exhausted his mounts by now with hard riding. I wish I had Thunderbolt here!"

And as he spoke a gigantic equine shadow crossed the headlights that gleamed down the cut. There was a clatter of hoofs from the darkness as the rider wheeled into the wind, and with a plunging grace, Hazel Farley brought Thunderbolt prancing to a halt beside them.

"The mob's out!" she cried. "The alarm has spread through the town! All Manford's on the way here to lynch them!"

"God bless you!" cried Cosgrove in high glee. "Get into this car, Miss Paul Revere. Gaines, cut down through the Broad Coulee trail! We'll have him in jail before the fools get back to town!"

As he spoke he had her out of the saddle and into the waiting car. She expected him to follow, but he turned to mount Thunderbolt.

"Where are you going?" she cried.

"I'm going to show Lederer the way home!" he answered, and was gone into the howling gale.

CHAPTER XXXV. .

THE ABYSS.

THAT was a turbulent night in the mountains, for the wind, coming out of the north in irrepressible fury, was split into a hundred varying currents by rocky barriers and rugged cañons. Cosgrove, aware of the haste which would drive Lederer to press his animals to death, strove to hold the spirited red mare he rode to an even canter.

But the wind was Thunderbolt's ally. She found in its vagaries a thousand pretexts for the wild spirit which impelled her to gallop madly through the night, or prance crazily at the weird shadows which the rock strewn trail presented. So, although Cosgrove's firm hand held her in a

canter, that canter was not an even one. And added to the deviltry of the red mare, there was the play of the wind.

The gale lashed him like a desperate opponent, roaring down upon him in a blast of thunder as he crossed the mouth of this cañon, or that arroyo. Behind every crag the gale seemed to lay in ambush; waiting to leap out upon him with a force which more than once threw the curvetting red mare from her balance.

As he intruded more deeply into the mountains, this combination of fretting mount and turbulent gale grew from an exasperating obstacle to a grave menace. For the trail in the mountains wound through rugged mazes which were often precarious.

Here it arose to twist about a shoulder of rock in a flimsy footpath where a misstep threatened death. Then it drew to the edge of a steep bank floored with shattered rock. The blackness of night made invisible the depths into which that bank fell away, and the narrow trail, disappearing on the verge of it, gave no promise of integrity.

But Cosgrove could not hesitate; he could not halt his mission here. There was a resolution in his heart which would have dared chaos.

He paused on the rim of the bank because Thunderbolt, precariously keeping her feet in the treacherous, sliding ground, had to turn sidewise, bracing herself and her rider against the fury of the wind. The red mare paused thus, for a moment, and shuddered with a fear her rider did not feel.

But an instinctive care for his mount might have given him hesitation, had he not in that moment pictured vividly the fleeing Lederer, pressing an exhausted mount through the darkness for the border. And Cosgrove could not see Lederer go. In one moment of his trial he had known that this adventure must end in the inevitable, romantic manner.

He would marry Hazel Farley, and on the ruins of the edifice his enemies had built Hazel and he would establish a life of happiness. But the ruin must be made complete. He knew that.

For her sake; for the happiness of Hazel Farley, the ruin of Lederer and Farley must

be made complete. They had not hesitated to stretch the net for him—and it had broken. He must now gather up the ends, for it was only by so doing that he could remove from her life a menace which might even in this moment of victory turn her jubilation into grief.

Cosgrove, swung the red mare across the turbulent pathway of the wind, and a lash of the quirt, such as she had never felt since the day he broke her, sent her sliding, struggling forward into the blackness.

They came to the bottom in a chaos of hoofs and struggling, writhing bodies; horse and man together fighting for hold and equilibrium. And they found themselves in a gale lashed, smothering flood of white water.

Frantically, the red mare fought to extricate herself from the mountain stream gone mad, and Cosgrove struggled to retain his hold on the mare, shouting to her with resonant, encouraging words. While she writhed with lashing hoofs and tossing, frenzied head, slipping on the stony bottom, thrown again and again with her footing all but regained; now upright with forefeet striving as if for a grip upon the howling, thunderous air; while she thrashed about in that bedlam of wind and waters, he gained the saddle, and, heroically, he kept it.

He kept the saddle, giving the frightened animal encouragement, soothing her with great shouts which vied against the wind, And his firm hand calmed her. Thunderbolt, her confidence regained, thrashed the waters of that stream until she regained the opposite bank. And there she pulled herself ashore, like a swimmer, using her forefeet as a man might use his hands, pulling herself up onto a high bank, to stand there quivering, awaiting Cosgrove's bidding.

He bade her follow the bank, and this she did, stumbling along a rugged shore until, with a sure instinct, she found the trail. In the oppressive darkness, he felt her quiver beneath him, he felt her start, and turn with short, excited steps which opposed the bit, and, leaning forward, he saw that her ears were pricked up, her nostrils eagerly sniffing the air.

At once he knew that she divined through

scent and hearing the presence of another animal. Containing her with a steady hand, he urged her slowly forward. Inasmuch as it seemed to him that he had been traveling many hours, and indeed, the windswept heavens proclaimed a dawn which was not far distant, Cosgrove was not incredulous that he might now be close upon the fugitive.

He frowned anxiously as he debated whether, if Lederer were indeed closely in front of him, the sound of Thunderbolt's hoofs, clicking loudly on the stony trail, would betray his coming. The problem was solved for him dramatically by a shot; by the whine of a bullet which followed; by the frantic plunging of Thunderbolt and a squeal with which she proclaimed that the bullet had grazed her flesh.

She plunged off, rearing, away from the sound of that shot, and Cosgrove had hardly seen the flash which stabbed the night and betrayed the direction from which the attack had come before he was hurled against a wall of rock and came down with Thunderbolt to the ground. He wriggled from beneath the body of the struggling mare which had pinned one leg to the earth, and whipped out his gun.

In the same instant that he scrambled free, his enemy was upon him. Lederer had leaped from the darkness which concealed him and, believing his shot to have brought Cosgrove down, was intent upon delivering the death blow.

It was, of course, a mistake, for Cosgrove was unhurt. He leaped to his feet even Lederer shoved forward his gun to give him a finishing shot, and, using his own weapon clubwise, he whipped it up, striking the gun from Lederer's hand even as it exploded, and with the upward sweep of his arm delivering a further blow upon Lederer's head which sent him spinning backward.

Lederer cried out as he fell a victim to this surprise, but, evidently still under the impression that Cosgrove was wounded, did not despair.

"Curse you!" he roared. "That's the last blow you'll strike. You're a dead man now, Cosgrove! Pray, damn you, pray! When I heard you shouting at the ford I

knew you was mine, and by Gawd, nothin' can save you now!"

Cosgrove had not fired his gun, and Lederer therefore felt doubly assured that he was wounded. In the gray obscurity of the night he stooped and picked up a large stone. Then, with an exultant, savage cry, he jumped forward.

As he saw Lederer bear down upon him, Cosgrove laughed. Dodging the blow which Lederer aimed, he struck the man again with the muzzle of his gun. He reached the face, and the gun sight laid it open from brow to jaw.

"That's a gun, Lederer!" cried Cosgrove as his opponent started back. "I hit you with a gun! Now, come on!"

Lederer stood crouching forward, smearing the blood from his eye with one hand.

"Put up yore gun!" he roared furiously. "I'll kill you with my two hands!"

Cosgrove thrust the gun in its holster.

"It's up!" he cried. "Come on!"

And with confidence in Cosgrove's good faith, Lederer, not caring to admit that he held a rock in his hand, plunged forward once again.

He aimed a smashing blow at Cosgrove's head with the hand that held the rock, and Cosgrove would no doubt have succumbed then and there had that blow hit him; but he dodged, and, catching Lederer's fist with both his hands, he twisted it backward, throwing into the twist all the weight of his body. With a scream which mingled rage with pain, Lederer dropped the rock from his grasp, and, wrenched off his feet, fell crashing upon the rock ground.

Cosgrove was upon him in an instant, and in blackness the two struggled there together, unable to see, unable to choose their hold or aim a blow. They struggled in a blackness which baffled skill, and depended only upon the strength which with they could hold when the right grasp came, and break when the other's grip became too deadly.

Again and again they struck. Cosgrove felt the other's arm snap around his throat in a grip of desperate energy, and with all his might he struck upward at the face which he felt must be close above that deadly arm. He caught Lederer's cut face with

his fist and, infuriated to madness, Lederer bashed heavily at the head he held within his arm. He got two blows home which shattered Cosgrove's world in a shock of fiery torture. It dazed him, but in his daze he plunged upward with his body, and the last crashing blow of Lederer's fist struck home on the solid rock.

With a shattered, bleeding fist, Lederer shrieked his pain and relaxed the hold which had Cosgrove close to unconsciousness. But something more potent than consciousness impelled Cosgrove to take advantage of it. He stumbled to his knees and, groping for Lederer's throat, found it. His fingers closed on it and pressed with all the strength of his clenched hands.

Lederer writhed, feeling life blacken in his mind. He writhed, and then in the blackness, he kicked. His kick lashed the air, but it flung Lederer from the ground, and his weight thus being hurled upon Cosgrove's hands, it brought the two of them crashing upon the rocks. Lederer beneath, Cosgrove on top. They rolled over and over.

Now Cosgrove lost his hold, found it again with one hand, sought to join it with the other, and received a blow in the mouth which cut his lip, filling his mouth with blood, choking him. Then Lederer was free. He sprang to his feet and kicked with spurred heel at the darkness where he felt Cosgrove's form to be.

Cosgrove received one glancing blow of that deadly heel in the side of his chest. He had been halfway upon his feet and it sent him spinning, spinning into the blackness with the warm blood streaming down his side where the spur had cut. And then he saw the black form of Lederer, only a trifle blacker than the night, stumble across his vision. He appeared as though the man was retreating, but where? To what could he retreat?

On his knees Cosgrove glanced before the stumbling figure and caught the glint of a revolver on the ground. With a cry he plunged forward. He saw Lederer pause for a split second in his stumbling progress and in that split second he hurled himself on the man.

He swung Lederer off his feet with a

mighty upward surge away from that gun. And then with an effort designed to send the body hurtling to the ground, Cosgrove let him go and stood staggering with exertion—and with amazement. *For the body of Lederer never reached the near-by earth!*

It was as though he had flung him into the air and seen him magically disappear. Swiftly upon leaving his hands, Lederer should have crashed to the rocky ground. But he did not.

Cosgrove had hurled the man from him, and only a silence followed. It seemed that this silence lasted an eternity, as if Lederer hung suspended in the black air, invisible above him.

Then came a hideous cry from in front of Cosgrove and below him. And from far below him there arose the horrible sound of a man's body dashed with tremendous impact upon naked rock.

With an exclamation of horror, Cosgrove moved forward in the blackness, a foot, a yard, and then he stopped. He stopped because his outstretched leg reached into vacancy. And the uncanny truth dawned upon him. *He had fought with Lederer upon the brink of an unseen precipice!*

CHAPTER XXXVI.

OUT OF THE GRAY MORN.

WERT FARLEY had sat in silence while they drove him into Manford. For he was frightened. His befuddled brain had not at first believed Cosgrove's warning that the mob had turned against him. He had conceived Cosgrove's intention of arresting him to be established upon revenge.

Had he been in Cosgrove's place, he knew that he would have done as much. Had he beaten an enemy as Cosgrove had beaten him, he would never have let the victory rest until he had followed up that beating with black ruin. So he had been convinced in his drink obscured mind that the arrest which Cosgrove had engineered was the vengeful kick that he himself would have dealt a fallen man.

But, after Hazel Farley's coming, the realization had begun to dawn upon him

that the warning which Cosgrove had delivered was true, and while he sat in the car he heard his darkest fears confirmed.

"Christofferson couldn't hold them," Hazel explained to Gaines. "They smashed through the windows and the alarm spread to the people already in the streets. They rushed the courthouse from outside and the guards fell down miserably. But they stopped to hear stump speeches in the courthouse square.

"They got worked up into a fury. They wanted to tear them to pieces. It was like a hell, full of demons. Christofferson was almost weeping, he was quite helpless. And then I thought what would happen if they got out to the ranch and found you there.

"I knew he would try and hold them back, and I was afraid—something might happen to—to—you." Her voice fell away, something of embarrassment in it. Farley strained all his faculties to hear. "So I saddled Thunderbolt and rode out," she said. "Oh, why has he gone away? He shouldn't have gone alone!" Her thoughts were all for him. Her sole interest in this matter was for him. For Cosgrove alone she had defied the gale in that wild ride.

As they swung into the dirt trail across the Broad Coulee, the great wind brought them the sound of a galloping host; a body of men who thundered along the road which traversed the prairie to the north. It was the mob, hurrying to the kill, pressing toward the Bar Nothing ranch which they would find deserted.

"We'd best make for Sheerwater," muttered Gaines.

"Shore. They'll never hold the jail at Manford!" assented Slade. And thereupon Farley made known his fear.

"Call out the troops!" he roared from his place in the tonneau. "It's riot and murder! It's a thing for the troops!"

"You might a thought of that before you called the mob together," said Webb dryly; and Farley, with a snarl, subsided.

In the hardened years of his life, Wert Farley had from time to time dealt expertly with mobs. He had used mobs and controlled them. A politician of sorts, he had exploited the mob, and was not ungifted with a crude knowledge of mob

psychology. But in this moment, all his knowledge served only to emphasize the danger which menaced him. He had no thought or hope of coping now with the element which he had beforetime employed to conquer and to kill.

All fight and the will to fight was gone from him. All hope and the thought of hope was torn from his mind. In the moment when Gaines had made his startling revelation of Mase Farley's murderer, something had snapped in Wert, the victim's brother.

The sudden realization that in this conspiracy of plunder and violence, he had been involved with the man who had slain his brother had brought home to Farley the single element which his nature had never until then contained. That was a consciousness of guilt.

And with that consciousness of guilt, all the bully's manhood oozed away. All that was left him was the specter of his fear.

He carried that fear with him in silence, and in silence they conducted him to the jail at Sheerwater, which hamlet was all but deserted by a population that had migrated to the trial. This was vouchsafed to them by the town marshal who opened the jail. And it was the means of breaking Farley's silence.

"They're all away to the trial," this sad functionary said, and eyed the prisoner narrowly.

"A part of the mob!" shrieked Farley. Hazel blanched at the hideous fear which rang in Farley's cry. "They'll come for me!" he cried. "They'll come! Take me away from here! It ain't right to leave me here!" He was shaking, quivering; a great, burly figure of a man, divested of manhood, insane with fear. Hazel turned away from the sight of him and Slade sternly urged him toward the cells.

"Hold yourself in, Wert!" he snapped. "You ain't dead yet!"

The cell door clanged upon him.

"Rest there," growled Gaines. "They ain't gettin' through to you till they get past the whole raft of us." He turned to Slade. "You boys stay here," he said. "I'll get over to Manford and pick up some men we can trust."

At the doorway he found Hazel and told her of his mission.

"Better come along," he urged. "Time you was gettin' home."

Without a word she followed him into the darkness and rode beside him into Manford once again without a word. For to speak would have been to betray what was moving in her mind; and her thoughts were all for Cosgrove.

Gaines whisked the car into the courthouse square at Manford and had to shout so that his voice might be heard above the thunder of the gale.

"I'll drive you home first!" he cried.

"No!" she said. "I'll stay with you."

The square was all but deserted. In the courthouse they found Sheriff Christofferson, profoundly disturbed, and seven men were grouped about him. They talked fatuously, and it was obvious that their words covered the knowledge that they were incapable of action. At the entrance of Gaines and the girl, they subsided in sullen embarrassment.

"Did they get 'em?" the sheriff demanded eagerly.

"No," Gaines answered. "Thanks to a girl they didn't. While you hombres ran round in circles this young lady rode out and gave us warnin' enough to snake Farley out of the way before they got there."

"Where is he?"

"Over at Sheerwater. He's safe for the present, but I'm takin' you boys back with me an' as many more as we can depend on. We got to hold him safe till Cosgrove gets back!"

The sheriff's square face fell lugubriously.

"Ain't he with you?"

"No. He's gone 'lone riding after Lederer. Lederer lit out for the hills."

"But, my God!" cried the sheriff. "We'll never hold them without Cosgrove!"

"Who else can we have?" snapped Gaines.

"There's Pedley an' Morgan and a dozen others. The jurymen are all with us. But they're all gone out to the Bar Nothing."

"Leave one man here to bring 'em over as soon as they get back. Get yore rifles, boys, an' come with me," Gaines ordered.

There was an obedient movement as they hurried about the room, and there was a businesslike clicking as they made sure their rifles were prepared. Then there was a movement toward the door.

"Wait a minute!" Hazel cried out her command so that it startled them.

"What about Cosgrove?" she demanded. They stared at her, bewildered, patently asking, "Well, what of him?"

"Before you go out to Sheerwater, you've got to help him!" she cried. "Don't you see? He's gone out alone! He's in danger! And you only think of saving the wretched hide of the man who tried his best to see him killed!"

Gaines looked troubled.

"But it's what he would want, Hazel," he protested. "Can't you see this is what he wanted us to do?"

"What good will it do him to do what you think he wanted, if he dies out in the mountains all alone?" she said. "And that's what it amounts to. Death! He will pursue Lederer until he overtakes him! And do you think that Lederer won't fight? I tell you he'll fight as a coyote fights; treacherously, without honor or fair play. He'll ambush him in the dark! He'll shoot in the back!"

"And you know how Cosgrove will deal with him! I tell you he doesn't know what fear means! You know that! And God knows how many men Lederer may have with him! You can't go to Sheerwater now! You've got to go out and save him first!"

"But the mob—"

"How, can we be responsible for the mob? We've done our best. We've brought him in and put him in a safe place. Oh, why can't you see the truth. Nothing is achieved if Cosgrove dies! Anything we do will be only failure then. And you talk of saving this beast, this skunk, while his life is in danger!"

"But Wert Farley is your uncle, girl! He's your own father's brother!"

She laughed bitterly.

"A fine brother! My father's brother! And he shielded the man who murdered him to condemn an innocent man to death!"

"But he is your uncle! You've got to think first of your own flesh and blood!"

"Of my flesh and blood?" she cried, and consumed him with the fire of her eyes. "And what of the man I love? Is he not more than flesh? Isn't he more to me than blood, or life, or the desire to live without him?"

They stood silent before the beauty of her wrath and the fervor which was in her eyes and voice.

"If you leave here to-night," she cried, "it will be for him. It will be to ride out and give him aid."

And then her fury fell beneath a cloud which swept over the brilliant flame of her countenance, as thick rain deadens the embers of a fire.

"And quickly!" she almost sobbed, as an awful realization overcame her. "Quickly!" she cried. "It may even now be too late!"

She caught up her words with a sharp click of her breath, and her hand flew to her throat as a booming murmur arose above the riot of the winds. Christofferson strode to the window and flung it open.

Outside the square was filled with men on horseback and afoot. There was a motor car with headlights aglow, and that, too, was filled with men. Among this close massed crowd one could see here and there a rifle barrel glimmer in the light of the lamps. The men in the square roared in a dull murmur and here and there a voice arose above the rest. One voice particularly arose bellowing above the mob. It was the voice of one who pressed close to the open window and bespoke the sheriff.

"Where are they? Bring 'em out! Tell 'em we want 'em!"

"Come on, Christofferson, give the swine up or we'll come in and get them!"

The mob was back and reinforced. Exasperated at having its quarry whisked from its grasp, they had come in a fury of determination to regain it.

"They ain't here!" cried Christofferson. "Farley's over at Sheer—"

Gaines was upon him with a strong hand across the sheriff's mouth. "Shut up, you fool!" he cried.

But the sheriff had gone too far.

"Sheerwater!"

"Sheerwater!"

The cry arose, deep-throated from the heart of the mob, and was taken up in a clamorous singsong. With a roar the car was under way and the clatter of hoofs indicated that the mounted men were not slow to follow.

Gaines sprang for the door, but Hazel was before him.

"Let them go!" she cried. And she threw herself across the door. "You won't leave here except to follow him!"

Behind her faintly sounded the rumble of a started engine. Gaines tried with gentle firmness to urge the obstinate girl aside, but she gave way too late. When he rushed out into the night it was to see his car depart with its load of vengeful rioters toward Sheerwater.

"Good God!" he cried. "We're stranded now!"

"Will you follow him? Or must I go alone?" cried Hazel. And they were upon the porch of the courthouse, the men clutching their rifles, the girl persuading them with fiery conviction.

"We all go to get horses first!" snapped Gaines.

It was Sheriff Christofferson who collected the horses, but it took time. The sky was gray with morning when they forgathered in the square to mount the animals. And the dozen who had followed the mob to the ranch joined them there so that they made a considerable company.

Hazel, in a frenzy of eagerness to undertake the mission which she feared might now be all too late, sat a prancing pony across the line they would have taken and implored them.

"It's too late now," she cried, "to talk! I'm riding for the mountains. Is there a dozen men who'll ride with me? Are there two or three? Is there one?"

But they murmured, looking toward Gaines.

"Sheerwater!" he cried harshly, for in that moment his mind was made up. His man's mind knew that to follow Cosgrove would be a waste of time inasmuch as he must now either be dead or successful in his quest. And at Sheerwater they would need men.

And then, even as he gave his bluff de-

cision, he saw with amazement that all consternation had fled from Hazel's face. She looked past him and laughed, then, wheeling, she set her pony at a mad gallop up the main street of Manford. Turning in their saddles they saw what had elated her, and jostling one another they followed.

Down the street slowly single-stepping after an agony of hard riding, approached a tall red mare. In the saddle was a youth who rode with tight clenched teeth and whose face was parchment pale. It was Cosgrove, and lying like an effigy across the mare before him was dead Cliff Lederer, a terrible thing of shattered bones and bloodstained clothing.

Gaines saw this figure of life and death and triumphant manhood as it approached, and summed up the meaning of it in a flash. Cosgrove had slain Lederer in the mountains. And it occurred to him that the fewer witnesses to this event would be the better. He turned on Christofferson and the men who followed him.

"Get over to Sheerwater!" he cried. "I can attend to this!"

He saw them go, and resumed his gentle trot toward the queer group of figures which the dawn had brought out of the mountains. And as he did so, he saw Hazel Farley and Bradley Cosgrove come together. She rode up beside him, and with scarcely a glance at the dead man across his saddle bow, she leaned from her own saddle to clasp that dauntless rider in her arms.

Gaines, immeasurably touched, drew his pony to a halt, and in the lonely street in the gray of morning, he was the only witness of that meeting. It was a fantastic tableau against the dreary landscape, and for a space remained immovable, as though for all eternity.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE BREAKING POINT.

THE name of the apathetic town marshal of Sheerwater was Neal, and in his dispassionate, collected manner, he was not unobliging. Farley, who had known him many years and used him as he had either used or fought with every man of

his acquaintance, now approached him for the first time with a recognition of his official position. To Neal's inordinate astonishment, Farley had a whine in his voice and a pitiful, furtive cowardice in his bleared eyes.

"For Gawd's sake, get me some lickor, Neal," he pleaded. "I'm all shot to hell an' I can't stand it! I can't!" His voice arose to a hysteria on the verge of tears. "I can't stand it!" Then his voice dropped again. "Gimme something to drink!" he whispered.

With an incredulous sniff Neal assented. It was nothing to him that Farley desired liquor. It was nothing to him to provide it. He was the most efficient provider of red eye in three counties.

When he returned with the bottle and a tin cup, Farley snatched it from him as the proverbial drowning man clutches the straw. He turned his back upon Neal to pour a cupful of the stuff and drain it in one draught. He choked and spluttered. Then, fondly clutching the bottle to him, he turned to his provider again.

"Are they down at the door?" he cried excitedly.

"Who?"

"Them. Slade! Webb!" Then he pounced on a new aberration. "Why ain't you there, too?" he cried. "Get down there! Get down to the door! They'll come an' you won't be there! They'll come—" The awful dilemma flared up in his mind again. "My Gawd!" he cried. "They'll come an' there's only a handful of men to meet them!"

He flung away to the back of his cell and sank to the narrow cot which furnished it. Sitting there in a huddle, he poured out with trembling hand another mighty draught of the fiery liquid and drank it down. Catching the sight of Neal at the bars of his cell, he flared up against him.

"Get out there an' do yore duty!" he screamed. "Get out an' guard this jail! You got to protect me now! It's up to you! Get out!"

With an apathetic feeling that something was radically wrong with Wert Farley, Neal left the cell corridor to join the others.

In his dull way Neal was right. Some-

thing was wrong with Farley. Wert had gone to pieces. He had said he couldn't stand it and he couldn't. Under the stress of these awful circumstances he had gone completely to pieces. His mind now verged upon madness. His spirit was like the poisonous fluid which he drank; fiery, but altogether liquid, volatile.

The spectacle of a dead brother was branded upon his consciousness, and he could not contemplate it without the remembrance of Klien, tall, lean and vindictive.

Klien towered above the men he dealt with like an evil genius; he towered in Farley's drink fevered mind out of all proportion to his natural stature. Klien, he now perceived, had been the leading spirit in the drafting of that iniquitous will. Klien no doubt had resolved to murder Mason Farley even while he used the brother to obtain the instrument which would make that murder profitable.

In the muddled recesses of his mind Farley now remembered how Klien had so unreasonably insisted on Cosgrove's death. And the memory twisted in his breast the knife which tortured him; for with it he realized that Klien had foreseen how the prosecution of Cosgrove for the murder of Mason Farley would no doubt uncover the real slayer.

And he had played into Klien's foul hands. He it was who had led the ring of murderers, thieves and plunderers to the goal which was to be his brother's fortune. That will had been his conception, and in drawing it up they had drawn up their own death warrant.

"In the event of death!" That was the clause which had led to Klien's quick death. "In the event of death!" That was the clause whereby he had sought to send Cosgrove the way of Klien and of his brother. "In the event of death!" The ominous words rang in his fevered mind as the clamor of bells ring for an execution.

Over and over the words recurred, sometimes mechanically and without meaning to him; in which periods he paced his cell, hopelessly, dumb with the agony which was depriving him of reason; swigging at his bottle, cursing and weeping in low tones to

himself. And sometimes they would ring out with hideous clearness.

"*In the event of death!*" reminded him with the horror of a spectral executioner that they were for him, that they were his death warrant as they had been the death warrant of his brother and of Klien.

Then he would sink to the miserable cot. He would scream out in protest and in pleading. Not for him! No, not for him! He had known nothing of Klien's purpose! He was not guilty of that!

But the words of the will would not be silenced. They were repeated in his twisted, tortured mind by a power that cries and curses could not reach. "In the event of death!" that insufferable voice insisted. And Farley knew it was for him. He pictured the coming of his death, the intolerable violence of it.

"They'll kill me! They'll murder me! Keep them away!" he shrieked. "For God's sake, keep them away!" and with a hideous animal cry, he flung himself, crashing against the far wall of his cell as footsteps sounded in the corridor.

It was Slade and Webb.

"We're going to take you out of here, Farley," said Slade coldly. "If the mob comes through before Gaines gets back, there ain't nothin' will hold this jail. We'll take you to Neal's house in the town, and play like we've got you here."

Farley went with them in silence. Wordlessly, he followed Neal through the gray patches of the hamlet and he quietly took up his new quarters in the bare frame house which was the marshal's home. Neal left him there with a caution.

"Don't try to get away!" he warned him. "Yore only chance is to stay in hiding till Cosgrove comes. Slade reckons Cosgrove is the only man that can hold the mob. So stay put. I'm watchin' outside!"

Farley stared at him somberly, hardly hearing him, for that fatal clause of the will still rang in his mind, persistently and without reprieve or abatement. And as Neal closed the door of his house, the death sentence arose with a clamorous din, shrieking the words with a thousand tormenting voices.

From the streets outside, from the road

which ran to Manford, a wild roar mingled the fatal sentence with the cries of an animal thirsting for blood. Up the main street dashed two cars and horsemen followed, a mob in furious haste. They dismounted from their cars and horses before the doors of the jail.

"Where is he?"

"Farley!"

"Bring him out!"

"Farley! Farley! Farley!"

The roar of the mob came in dull thunder to the wretched prisoner in Neal's barren house. It mingled with the reiterated menace of the deadly words Farley had himself designed, pounding clamorously upon his shaken mind, driving him from a frenzy of despair into a hell of madness.

He paced the room with catlike strides, up and down, back and forth, fending himself from the walls, madly incapable of thought; blind, deaf and impenetrable by all save the death howl of the mob and that persistent, terrible sentence, "In the event of death!"

He hardly sensed the quiet spell which marked the slim moment that Slade held the mob, addressing it. He hardly heard the sharp cries with which that priceless silence was broken. But he heard the subdued roar that followed as they surged forward for the jail, and even in his mad fear, which occupied all his faculties and all his mind, he heard the bellow of Slade's voice which rose above it.

With that he stopped his furious pacing and, rushing to the window, strove to see something of what passed. There was a silence outside—the besiegers were taking council. There was a dim glow of morning and dark knots of figures at the end of the street where stood the jail. Farley peered out like an animal furtively peering from its den, and a cunning thought came to rack his mind.

Why could he not escape? Escape? Why could he not creep out and run! Run with all the speed and energy of his body? Run away into the prairie? Run and run? Always avoiding them? Always before them? Why could he not break through that glass? Up the street and away from them?

It was the impulse of the animal, and

beyond that point Farley was no longer sane. For this reason, it did not occur to him to throw the window open. He turned into the room and seized a chair with which he shattered the glass and casing.

Then he would have leaped out, but as he prepared to do this, three riders came cantering up the street. With an inarticulate cry he ducked backward, throwing himself upon the floor. But they did not notice the house, they passed on, intent upon some strategy of the mob.

And then through the shattered window came the boom of a high, impassionate voice, a voice which reached him from the dim distance where the jail was.

"If you don't get out o' the way, Slade, take the consequences!"

And the bellowing thunder of Slade's reply:

"If you take him, somebody hangs for it! In the event of this man's death—"

With a scream Farley flung himself behind a decrepit couch at the side of the room, sobbing and cursing in his mad fear of that insistent sentence. And while he sobbed, Christofferson and his men rode into Sheerwater and the mob scattered, sweeping up the street past the house where their quarry lay; thundering, cursing, raging as they clattered by.

And Farley did not hear them, nor did he associate the clamor of their passage with aught but the clamorous noises which dinned in his shattered mind. All that awoke him from that tortured trance was the entrance of Neal who came in, grinning apathetically.

"Christofferson's in with a load of men from Manford," he said. "The mob's scattered for a while." All of which Farley heard without comprehension, glaring at the marshal with the fixity of madness. "They say Cosgrove's back in Manford and Lederer's dead. Smashed to a jelly in a fight with Cosgrove! For God's sake!"

The cry was wrung from him as Farley plunged with a shriek upon his throat.

"Say that again! Say it! Curse you! Damn you! Say that again!" Farley screamed out his malediction while he thrust the man free of his mad grasp. Neal staggered back against the door jamb, and

then, with sudden realization that he had to deal with a maniac, he turned and bolted from the house.

Farley stood in the middle of the room petrified. So it was true! It was true that this sentence was to be worked out to the uttermost letter of the will. "In the event of death!" First his brother. Then Klien! And now Lederer! It was true and unescapable. He himself would be the next to die!

Raving and cursing, he paced the room. He sat at the desk in the corner. He scribbled madly upon paper there. He arose to shriek out a malediction upon all the world. He sank to his seat at the desk again. He fumed and scribbled and shouted wildly, trying to deafen his ears to the din of the insistent voices, the voices that drowned out all else but the condemnation of the will. The will!

He would write his own! He would revoke that sentence! He would order life instead of death! Life! Life! And he would leap through that shattered window and run away! He would run away from them all; from the hatred and malice and vengeful thirst for blood in which he had lived and worked; which he himself had set loose. He would run away!

Madly he scribbled at his desk, and madly arose from time to time to pace the room. And he was deaf to all save the terrible voices which doomed him, deaf to the noises outside which proclaimed that the jail had fallen, that they had discovered his escape from that stronghold and that a hundred horsemen were out scouring the country for him. Deaf! Deaf! Deaf to all that might yet have saved his miserable life.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"LIFE EVERLASTING!"

BRADLEY COSGROVE was weary with a fatigue that surpassed the meaning of weariness. He was hungry—weak with hunger. And the fight he had fought in the blackness, the shock of it and the stress had left his body filled with pain. Yet the news Gaines brought to him when

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he rode up after the tableau was broken, filled Cosgrove with exuberance.

Hazel, her mind bent only upon his welfare, his comfort and his safety before all else, would have persuaded him to retire from the activities of that night, to dismount and find refreshment, sleep and peace. But that exuberance which flooded his pale cheeks and irradiated in his eyes, silenced her. She knew well that nothing could hold him back from the way that led to the end of this adventure.

So she helped him to saddle a horse to give Thunderbolt a well earned rest, and was in the saddle beside him when he took the road for Sheerwater. If she could not win him from the grim task, there was no power on earth which could prevent her sharing it with him.

They rode through the dawn, and there was no attempt to nurse the endurance of their horses. It seemed almost a race they ran along that rolling, dusty road; a race in which each mount pressed his mate for first place; in which the riders spurred and lashed their ponies forward in a fury which acknowledged the life of a man to be at stake.

And because they rode fast they rode silently. The only communication which passed between them was that silent communion wherein the girl examined the tired eyes and the grimly set profile of the man she loved; for Cosgrove rode with clenched teeth, fighting a weariness which implored him to take rest.

They swept into Sheerwater as the sun burst out above the mists, and they found few men there. Marshal Neal was present, and Christofferson, lounging with a knot of loud talking men at the doorway of the jail.

The jail door, significantly, stood wide open.

"Too late?" cried Cosgrove sharply, as he flung himself from his mount.

"Too late!" growled the sheriff bitterly.

One of the loud speakers in the doorway ceased his post mortem at that, to answer Cosgrove's black accusing gaze.

"We rode over from Manford hell for leather!" he vociferated. "And they ran away! Broke and scattered when we came.

But they got together again. Came back an' called our bluff!"

"Called your bluff?" demanded Cosgrove.

"Shore!" It was the sheriff spoke now, and he spoke firmly. "Our bluff. That's what it was. You don't expect we'd have shot down any man to protect such a skunk as Farley, do yer?"

"Then they've got him?"

"I don't know. He wasn't in the jail!"

At that point Slade, who had heard Cosgrove's voice from within came out of the building.

"We doubted we could hold the jail," he explained. "So we took him to Neal's house down the street."

"Then he's safe?"

"I don't know. Like a damn fool he got away. God only knows where he is now. I've got men out looking for him."

Cosgrove received this news in silence, thinking hard.

"Take me to that house!" he demanded.

Gaines, Slade and the girl accompanying him, strode afoot to the scene of Farley's agony. He examined the room where the wretched man had lost his mind. There were the mute evidences of the tragedy which had passed there in the night. A cupboard broken open; an empty bottle on the floor; the shattered window; the littered desk; the torn, disheveled couch; a broken chair. All these Cosgrove saw, and he pinned his attention to the desk.

"What's this?" he cried sharply, as he reviewed the scribbled sheets.

"Scribble!" said Slade gravely. "I can't make it out."

But Cosgrove could make it out and he did so. He made it out and read it in a firm voice and aloud.

"'In the event of death.' That's crossed out. Then again: 'In the event of death.' It's crossed out again. Then he starts:

"'I, Wert Farley, being of sound mind and in possession of all my faculties, do solemnly and sincerely curse, damn, and if there is any God, desire Him to torment and make suffer in this world and in the next, Jacob Klien, Cliff Lederer, Bradley Cosgrove, and any or all men who have had a part in drawing up and executing that

document which included the damnable words, *In the event of death*. They lie.

"'It's life that I'm dealing with now. Life. I'm going to live. To live and damn them. All of them. So, in the event of life, I hereby will and bequeath to my only heir and relation on this earth, and the only human being who has ever shown pity or mercy toward the oppressed, all my properties, all my share in the Bar Nothing ranch. All my goods and chattels. . . . Because I have broken the window. . . . I have broken the window . . .'"

Cosgrove paused frowning. "It's difficult to make out what he means. He says:

"'I am going to cheat them yet. They can't stop me if I get out onto the prairie, and they won't. I've broken the window and the words don't mean anything now. *In the event of death*. I hear it; but it doesn't mean anything because I'm going to live.

"'And all the time I live I want my fortune should go as I've said. In the event of life. That's how a will should be made. And this is my will. My will and testament. . . . I'm going to cheat them now!'"

"But the man's crazy!" cried Gaines. "That ain't worth the paper it's written on! He's mad!"

Cosgrove still frowned.

"It appears that we've been made the witnesses to a will," he said. "I think this document is worth saving."

And a man rode up with his horse foaming and his boots covered with white dust.

"Is Slade here?" he called in at the window. "They got him! He ran into them while they scoured the country for him. They got him an' strung him up. Wert Farley's dead on a tree in the river bottom!"

And Cosgrove spoke with a voice that had in it an awful seriousness. It was as though the supernatural had found a voice. It was as though fate spoke in the person of that lean youth who bent heavily upon the desk and set his bruised face in a grim mask of ironic pity.

"It may not be worth the paper it's written on," said Cosgrove's hollow voice.

"But it's true. The terms of this will were drawn up by Wert Farley when he started

on this trail to win his brother's fortune. 'In the event of death of any or all the heirs herein named, his third share of the Bar Nothing ranch will revert to my niece, Hazel Farley.' That was the will they drew. That was the document which led to all this tragic farce. And he, poor devil, has parodied it. 'In the event of life,' he says. And he crawls out to life everlasting."

And Cosgrove laughed, a strange nerve-shattering merriment.

Hazel leaped to his side.

"You're tired!" she cried. "You're spent!"

And he was. He sank in her arms to the chair beside the desk. And in a moment he was deeply, astoundingly asleep.

"Go!" she whispered to the others. "Help him over to the couch and go! Sleep is what he needs more than anything else in the world."

They placed him upon the couch and left her.

After they were gone she sat down beside him and, as a mother watches a sleeping child, she watched him.

"In the event of life!" she breathed. "Life everlasting! With you!"

THE END



LOOKING BACKWARD

I WISHT I wuz a boy wunst moar,
 I kno what I woud du;
 I'd gether all them hazel nuts
 That grows down bi the slough,
 An' then I'd bild a grate big dam
 Down bi that big high bank,
 An' back the crick up to our barn,
 So paw cood fill our tank;
 An' then I'd bild a nice big bote,
 With seets along the sides,
 So me an' Lizy—that's my girl—
 Cood hav some nice ole rides.
 I'd take her to the sirkus, too,
 An' buy her lemonade,
 An' popcorn balls an' P nuts, too,
 An' seets fur the P raid;
 An' when we both got big enuff,
 I'd marry her, U bet;
 (If I just knowed where she was at,
 I b'lieve I'd du it yet!) . . .
 Gee whiz! If I wuz just a boy—
 An' had the sense I've got—
 I'd crowd my life chuck full o' joy,
 Whether it paid or not;
 I'd grab the kernel of life's nut,
 An' never mind the shell;
 An' first of all, I'd have a home
 Instead of a hotel!

Will Thomas Withrow.



A Course in Etiquette

By E. K. MEANS

PINK DUCK and his wife, Ledora Duck, were driving through the Little Moccasin Swamp on their way to Tickfall. It was a difficult journey, for they traversed that great jungle on a road so heavily overgrown with brush that they followed a "trail"; and the trail was not on the ground at their feet nor blazed upon the trees. They located the road only by noting that above their heads the limbs of the trees did not interlock, indicating that some of the timber had been cut out for the passage of vehicles.

As they journeyed, Pink Duck was laboriously reading a book. It was a volume he had cherished for many days, and he had kept this book at hand after he had transferred all his household goods from his rude mud hut to his dilapidated wagon to move his earthly possessions to town.

"Dis here is a good book, Ledora," Pink averred for the thousandth time, as the fat sun-bonneted wife tried to precipitate him from his seat by colliding with a vine-covered stump to the menace of the front wheel.

"Huh!" Ledora grunted.

"It say words like dis:" Pink declared, reading slowly and giving an Ethiopian pronunciation to his words. "'Eve'y day people judge us by whut we do an' say.'"

"Dar, now!" Ledora snorted. "Dat's how come I proclamate so frequent dat you is de low-downest, no-'countest nigger—"

"Shut up, Ledora!" Pink commanded. "You done got off de subjeck. Listen: 'Dey carry away wid dem an im-pres-sion of us as ill-bred or well-bred.'"

"You ain't bred up no way," Ledora remarked. "You is pure scrub."

"'Sometimes it is a mis-ta-ken im-pres-sion,'" Pink read on, "'because of little un-sus-pec-ted blunders, we are mis-jud-ged, under-es-ti-ma-ted.'"

"Git up here, mule!" Ledora bawled.

"Now dis book is right," Pink declared, as he diverted his attention from its pages while Ledora and the mule struggled with a mess of slick, miry "gumbo" in their way. "Me, I wuz raised polite. My maw learnt me. 'Take off yo' hat!' Say, 'Yes'm,' 'Yessuh,' say, 'Scuse me, please!' Dem wuz advices I got. My maw raised me."

"My maw raised me," Ledora snapped.

"She raised me wid a hick'ry limb an' raised me frequent."

"Shore! But dat warn't manners. Dat wuz cornduck."

"Whut de diffunce?" Ledora demanded to know.

"Read dis book an' you'll find out dat a little nigger mought git skint alive eve'y day wid a oak paddle an' he wouldn't know nothin' about manners. Listen: 'Whut is de proper way to hol' de knife an' fork? Whut is de correct an' cul-tur-red way to eat cawn on de cob? Whut is de correct order of pre-ce-dence fer de weddin' march?' Whut little pickaninny could learn dem proper things by gittin' paddled fo' times per each day?"

"My good Lawd!" Ledora howled. "De man whut writ dat book wus a idjut—an' no limb didn't fall on him neither. He was bawnd dat way!"

"Tain't so," Pink snapped, as he continued to read: "'To those who are constantly in fear of doin' or sayin' de wrong thing, who cormit breaches of et-i-qu-et-te, minglin' wid men an' women often brings hu-mi-li-a-ti-on.'"

"Whut am a bree-ach of etti-cu-etty?" Ledora wanted to know. "Ef a nigger committed one of dem things aroun' me, I'd shoot at him six times an' throw rocks at him half a hour, an' repote him to de gran jury—ef I knowed it!"

"Huh!" Pink snorted. "You wouldn't know he done it. You warn't raised polite like me."

"Whoa!" Ledora howled at the mule. Then she remarked to the world: "Whut pesticides my mind is dat we is got to hunt a bood-war in dis here swamp whar we kin sleep all night. Do dat book signify whar to camp out an' be real shore dat de moc-casins won't chase you outen bed an' de rattlesnake tickle yo' nose wid his tail?"

"No'm. But it tells you whut to say ef you sneezes in public sawsiety."

They had started early in the morning, but the difficulties and delays of the journey had brought them at sunset to the place where they must spend the night in the woods. They were not disturbed at the thought, for they were thoroughly familiar with this sort of life. They would merely

tie their mule to a tree, rub him with certain odorous leaves to keep off mosquitoes; then anointing themselves with the juices of the same weeds, they would climb into the bed of their wagon and sleep.

Quickly they went about preparing their meager evening meal, while Pink quoted the contents of his book from memory:

"Does you know how to arrange de table fer a for-mal dinner? Is it correc' to cut a roll, or should it be broke wid de fingers? Whut is de correc' way to eat ass-parrow-grass on de cob?"

"Hursh! Shut yo' mouth!" Ledora whispered, as she straightened up from her cooking, disturbed by a loud rustling in the underbrush some distance away.

She climbed upon the seat of the wagon and rested an old shotgun across her fat knees while her eyes searched every clump of grass and the vicinity of every tree.

"Keep on lookin'," Pink said unconcernedly. "Yo' eyes is heap sharper dan mine. I done got cross-eyed an' shawt-sighted readin' of a book. Mebbe it's a bear or a swamp-cat smellin' dese here cookin' vittles."

The man took up the preparation of the meal where Ledora left off. In a moment there was a low hiss from the woman and Pink stepped upon the wagon-hub and raised himself up to see.

A wild man was coming toward them, threshing at the underbrush, falling and rising again, stopping twice to call aloud. But his voice was gone completely, and the sound made was a mingling of the croak of the frog and the hiss of the goose, leaving a bloody spume upon the cracked lips of the desperate and hopeless man.

"Huh!" Pink grunted. "Ef a man is introjuced to a puffleck stranger, whut muss he say?"

II.

THE man was following their wagon trail, but he did not know it. In fact, he knew nothing. His clothes had been torn to rags and he was covered with mud, mud which had been on his body for several days for it had caked upon his hands and face and had been augmented by frequent contributions until it was impossible to tell whether

he was white or black. His eyes were great, black, staring orbs, as devoid of expression and intelligence as the glass eyes of a doll. The lips were swollen and parched and black in color.

"Hello, dar!" Pink said in greeting to the stranger, waving at him his "Book of Etiquette."

The man did not answer. Except that he stopped and kept his unseeing eyes turned in their direction, he did not seem to hear.

"I knows whut ails dat man," Pink said. "He's done been lost in dese here woods ontill he's done parted wid his good senses. He's done fergot how to talk. He acks like he cain't even see no mo'."

"Slap him over de head wid dat manners book," Ledora chuckled, as she fingered the shotgun still resting across her knees. "He don't look to me like he's been raised polite."

Pink stepped from the hub of the wagon wheel and walked to the place where the man was standing. Putting his hand upon his shoulder, he pushed him gently forward to where the little campfire was burning. Sniffing the odor of the cooking food, the man uttered a little hungry whine like a puppy.

"It don't make no diffunce how crazy a man am," Pink said with a grin, "he's always got sense enough to eat an' he always knows when he is hongry."

"Whut's dat muddy thing he's totin' in his arms?" Ledora demanded from her lookout on the wagon seat.

Pink reached out and rubbed the caked mud from the package which the stranger was carrying in his arms like a baby. There was a whine of protest, but Pink announced after his inspection:

"It's somepin wropped up in a canvas bag. I's knowed a heap of men to git lost in dese here woods an' dey all picks up somepin or 'nother an' totes it through de whole trip, an' takes as good keer of it as ef it wuz a dawg or a baby. Sometimes it ain't no value a-tall an' is heavy. Mebbe it's a rock or a big chunk of wood, but dey don't lose it an' dey don't wanter leave it go."

"Dat bag ain't got nothin' in it wuth

keepin'," Ledora remarked. "Ef it had somepin in it, he would 'a' lost dat package fust. Why ain't you read in yo' book an' find out how to ax him to rest his hat an' set down an' favor his tired foots an' gib you somepin to eat outen his bag to he'p you make out yo' meal? I thought you called yo'self bein' raised polite!"

This splatter of talk meant that the two had no conception of the desperate condition of the stranger. Otherwise they would have been helpful and sympathetic in every way they could devise. Their idle and frivolous conversation came to an abrupt conclusion when the man suddenly dropped his precious bundle to the ground and sank down beside it in a dead faint.

"Dar now!" Ledora whooped as she leaped from the seat and slapped the mud of the swamp with her two big flat feet. "Whut is de properest mournin' clothes to wear at a fun'ral? How does you tell de bereaved fambly when you don't know whar dey is at, if any? Whut is de properest fust remark to a dead man's widdar woman? Dat is, ef he's got a widdar?"

While Ledora was bawling these mocking words at her husband, she was bending over the unfortunate man trying to restore him to consciousness. Pink grabbed a bucket and trotted over to a sluggish green-scummed pool and began to bathe the fellow's face with water. Then he made a discovery.

"Looky here, woman!" he bawled. "Dis ain't no nigger. Dis here man am white!"

"White folks git lost in dis swamp more frequent dan niggers," Ledora replied. "A white man ain't got no mo' sense dan to ramble aroun' in dese woods all by his lone se'f. But a nigger always takes a crowd with him."

For almost an hour they worked with the man before he showed a sign of returning consciousness. For a much longer time they continued to bathe his hands and face, giving him trickling drops of water upon a parched and swollen tongue. Then later they fed him drippings from the fat which had been fried in the skillet, slowly nourishing a famished body back to normal conditions.

It was the middle of the night before

he showed any intelligent comprehension of his surroundings. Then he asked a question which sounded like it made sense, and before they could answer he fell into a natural sleep.

"Git yo' book, honey, an' tell us whut to do when yo' dinner guest draps to sleep immediately attar he gobbles up all his vittles," Ledora said mockingly.

"He'll wake up in de mawnin' all rested an' wid his good sense back," Pink grinned. "Dat 'll be plenty time to learn him manners. I motions we takes a little nap an' git ready fer de fust lesson."

III.

WHEN the two negroes awoke in the morning, the white man was still sleeping like the dead. Pink bent over him and satisfied himself that it was merely the slumber of exhaustion and then occupied himself in preparing breakfast.

"When dat white man smells dis here grub, he'll wake up," he grinned.

"Who you reckon he am?" Ledora asked.

"He's got on citified clothes, whut dar is left of 'em," Pink observed. "I figger he's in dis here swamp wid some huntin' or fishin' crowd an' he oozed away an' left 'em. He ain't used to gwine on no camp hunts—ain't got on no fitten clothes. Dat's de kind of man whut always busts up de party by gittin' hisse'f lost."

Soon the man awoke and sat up. The unsuspecting negroes did not notice the keen alertness of his manner, the watchful glance of his shifting eyes, nor the attitude he continually held of listening for distant sounds.

"How did I get here?" he demanded.

"Us found you lost in de woods," Pink told him.

"Where you folks been?" he asked suspiciously, glancing at the wagon which contained a few articles of cheap and worn furniture.

"Ain't been yit," Ledora answered. "Jes' gwine. Us is movin' to Tickfall."

"Been there lately?" the stranger asked quickly.

"Naw, suh. It's been mighty nigh a year since us arrived at Tickfall. Us don't travel much," Pink told him.

"What day is this?" the white man next inquired.

"Dis am Friday, onlucky day," Ledora informed him.

The man considered a moment and answered:

"Yes, unlucky day. I've been lost in this hellish swamp for four days."

"Whar wuz you aimin' to go at?" they asked him.

"I was trying to take a short cut to Sawtown," the white man told him.

"You better go back to Tickfall wid us an' try agin," Pink suggested. "You cain't do no better ef Sawtown is yo' aim."

Pink took out an old corn-cob pipe, filled it with home-grown tobacco called "cotton" by natives, and was preparing to light it. The white man reached for the pipe with trembling, eager hands.

"Gimme that pipe!" he commanded. "I'm dying for a smoke!"

The rank odor of the tobacco vitiated the cool fragrance of the swamp as the lost man drew great whiffs from the bowl and expelled them from his nostrils.

"You colored people saved my life," he remarked. "If you hadn't found me, I'd be dead now. I'm half dead anyhow, as it is."

"Dat's right," Pink agreed, as the three sat beside the expiring embers of their breakfast fire. "You warn't in no shape to travel no further. Ed you'd 'a' found de big road whut ain't no great ways from here, you didn't had de sense to know it wuz de road."

"What you moving to Tickfall for?" the stranger asked.

"We been livin' in a little cabin on de far side of de swamp, but we couldn't git along dar an' make a livin' an' we craves town whar it ain't so lonesome. Us kin beg a few change from de white folks ef we gets too hard up when we lives in town whar white folks is."

The white man hesitated a moment, watchful, undecided about whether or not he wanted to say something. He glanced about him uneasily and then asked in a changed tone:

"Have you folks got a house to live in when you go to Tickfall?"

"Naw, suh. We's got our house furniture," Pink said, pointing to the stuff piled upon the wagon. "An' we's got dis here mule an' wagon. Us kinder hoped we could git a house some way an' mebbe I could do some light haulin' ontill we got started.

"Got any money?"

"I'm got about twenty dollars from de sale of my last crop," Pink told him, pulling a small wad of currency from his pocket. "'Tain't much, but it'll he'p us to rent a house."

"I've got a little cabin in Tickfall," the white man said. "I'll rent it to you for one year for eighteen dollars. That's cheap rent, but I owe you something for what you have done for me."

"How kin I find dat cabin?" Pink asked eagerly as he rose and counted out the money.

"I'm going back to Tickfall with you," the man replied. "I'll show you where it is."

"Bless Gawd! Le's git to movin'!" Ledora exclaimed eagerly. "Dis ole mule an' me is r'arin' to go to our new place to stay at."

"It's a house with two rooms close to the Shoofly church," the white man told them.

"Dat's fine. Us kin git our religium easy," Ledora chuckled as she led the mule under the wagon shafts which her husband upheld.

As the animal backed around, he stepped on something hard and tripped. In the effort to recover his footing, he kicked the object which had tripped him into the vines beside an old stump.

It was the mud-covered canvas bundle which the white man had brought to their camp.

The stranger had not completely recovered his senses. He had not missed this bundle. It lay there unnoticed by the colored man and his wife.

IV.

"I GUESS you better set up on de seat wid me, white folks," Pink suggested when they were ready to start.

"I'll ride easier if I sit back in the bed of the wagon. I feel stiff and I can stretch out," the white man answered.

"Our little dab of furnicher shakes aroun' some," Pink said apologetically. "We didn't hab enough to fill de wagon an' pack it tight, but ef you ain't got no real objections to gittin' punched in de ribs wid a chair leg, you kin set back."

"After what I have been through, a jab from a table leg is the least of my troubles," the man answered with a bitter grin.

For eight miles they made slow progress because they had to stop and remove fallen limbs from the road, sometimes they had to detour around a tree lying across the way, so several hours were consumed in getting to the main highway.

"We ain't but jes' ten miles from town now," Pink announced with gratification that they had completed the hardest part of the journey.

At the next turn of the road they were met by a large auto truck which was going away from Tickfall toward the river landing. The sand was very deep and the driver of the truck was afraid to turn aside from the beaten wheel tracks. He stopped and let Pink drive his mule on the side of the road and around him.

"Whar you cullud folks gwine at?" the autoist inquired, showing many perfect teeth in a friendly grin.

"Movin' to Tickfall to start a new life," Ledora said. "Life in de swamp ain't wuth livin' no more."

"Ef Tickfall is yo' end an' aim, I'll see you-alls agin," the driver answered. The engine roared its way through the sand, and from the first turn of the rear traction wheels the entire truck was completely obscured in a cloud of dust.

They had driven about two miles further when Pink turned partly around and addressed a remark to the passenger who rode in the rear.

"White folks, how many gallons of 'lectricity do it take to run one of dem big puff-buggies like dat'n we jes' passed by?"

No answer.

"He must hab fell asleep," Pink said to Ledora in a quieter voice.

"He ain't nappin'," Ledora told him,

stretching around where she could see. "He's missin'. Dat white folks ain't dar a-tall!"

Astonished at this, Pink stopped the mule and went around to investigate.

"Dat white man done fell or jumped off," he said in perplexity.

"He jumped off," Ledora told him. "You said he wore citified clothes, whut wuz left on him. He's ridin' dat truck todes de river whar he kin ketch de boat."

"Us would 'a' took him to Tickfall whar he could kotch de train," Pink said in a disgusted tone. "Leastwise dar warn't no call fer him to do us dat way—snuck off an' never axed us good-by."

"He warn't raised polite," Ledora chuckled, reaching a fat hand under the seat for the "Book of Etiquette." "Dis am whut de book say, listen: 'Forms of Farewell. Good-by an' Good-night are de only two forms to be used in leavin'. A-u-re-vo-ir is French an' should be used only in France'—"

"Wharabouts is Framce?" Pink wanted to know.

Echo answered. Evidently nobody knew. "Good-night an' good-by," Ledora repeated mockingly. "Naw, suh, I'm tellin' you, Pinkie, dat white man warn't fotch up polite."

"He acted like all de white mens does," Pink remarked grouchy. "Dey don't never thank a nigger fer nothin'."

"Good-night an' good-by!" Ledora bawled at the top of her voice.

"Night! By!" From the woods, the echo answered.

"Even dem woods is got mo' manners dan dat white man," Ledora chuckled.

"Dat's all right," Pink said finally. "Us done all we could fer him. I's kinder glad he lightened de load by leavin' us. Dis ole mule is got a hard enough pull when he hauls a ole, fat, pesticatin' nigger woman like you is."

"Don't git to r'arin' up at me an' throwin' slams," Ledora grinned. "'Tain't polite!"

"Dat white man done enough fer us," Pink asserted. "He done rent us a house cheap, an' ef he wanted to go on about his own bizzness, us needn't feel so bad."

"Dat's so," Ledora agreed. "Le's beat up dis ole mule an' git to dat house quick."

V.

"WHAR you folks gwine live at?" was Skeeter's first question when the mule and the dilapidated conveyance paused at his door.

"A white gemman rented us a empty cabin close to de Shoofly chu'ch somewhar," Pink answered. "He got lost in de woods an' we found him an' got him straight an' he let us hab de cabin cheap for eighteen dollars."

"Dat wuz too high," Skeeter told them. "Excusin' dat, I don't know no empty cabin up dat way. Whut wuz de white man's name?"

"He never told us no name an' us never named him," Ledora responded, her black hands resting helplessly upon her dusty lap.

"Whut sorter lookin' man wuz he?" Skeeter asked next.

The negro has a photographic eye. He sometimes lacks descriptive language, but give him time, and he can tell you the minutest details of a person's appearance, manner and dress. He also has the gift of mimicry and can imitate the sound of a human voice to perfection. Many a white woman has had a caller in her absence who did not leave a card, and yet she knew who the friend was from the description of her colored maid, and her imitation of the caller's voice and manner.

With the utmost particularity, Pink and Ledora described the appearance of the white man they had encountered in the woods. He was a dark white man with red under the skin, a "red bone," or one with Indian blood. His eyes were busy "reading sign" and he seemed like he was listening for something all the time. He had no whiskers on his face to speak of—just hadn't shaved for some days, and he had a scar on his jaw—looked like where a bullet had gone in because one back tooth was missing at that place. His eyes were black and his hair was black and he was chunky-built and square-like and talked quick and spoke out of one side of his mouth,—there was a great deal of this. Descriptive

phrases, spoken as they came to mind, but when the composite delineations were laid where they belonged, they made a complete man.

Skeeter Butts listened with eyes opened wide with astonishment, and when they had finished he said hastily:

"You cullud folks set right here until I comes back. I'll see you later."

He started in a swift run to the office of the sheriff of Tickfall parish. Mr. John Flournoy listened to Skeeter's story and then he and Skeeter got into the sheriff's automobile and drove rapidly to the Hen-scratch soft drink stand, which was Skeeter's place of business.

They found Pink and Ledora engaged in a grumbling controversy over their failure to secure the house, the loss of their rent money, the sudden departure of Skeeter, the probable whereabouts of the man whose life they had saved.

"All dis comes from not havin' no manners an' not gittin' raised polite," Pink grumbled. "Dat white man stole my rent money an' didn't say 'Thank you, dog' or nothin'. He departed away an' didn't say no 'good-by' or 'good-night' or nothin'. Skeeter listened to our words an' lit out an' told us to sot here an' didn't say 'Scuse me' or nothin'. 'Tain't manners, I tells you!"

"Aw, shut up!" Ledora snapped. "I wush dat fool whut wrote dat book had to swaller eve'y word he wrote, book an' all. He'd git sick an' die of colic like a mule."

"I don't never know a nigger dat gits a chance to git even wid a white man," Pink growled. "But I shore craves to learn dat swamp white man manners. Ef I'd 'a' knowed he wuz gwine leave so soon, I would 'a' loant him my manners book to read on de way."

"Shut up!" Ledora bawled. "Here comes de sheriff an' Skeeter Butts. I bet you done busted some rule of manners an' de law court is atter you."

"I ain't!" Pink snapped. Then he modified his denial. "Leastwise I hopes dey ain't found out nothin' on me."

"Uh huh!" Ledora grunted. "Yo' manners is puffleck but yo' cornduck is lackin'. I lives wid you an' I knows."

The sheriff conducted the two negroes to a back room in the Hen-scratch and asked them to repeat their story. When they had finished, Flournoy said:

"This white man is a robber named Kitt Starr."

"Suttinly, Mr. Johnnie," Pink agreed. "I jes' explained how he robbed me of dat eighteen dollars fer my rent."

"But he also robbed a store up at Shongaloon," the sheriff continued, patient despite the inconsequential interruptions of the negroes.

"Of co'se," Ledora declared as if she knew all about it. "Dat white man—he'll rob anything. He'll steal a nickel offen a dead man's eye."

"A storekeeper up there got a lot of money to pay off the cotton pickers. This robber entered the store at noon when everybody was at home at their meals and held up the storekeeper and got the money."

"Dar now!" Pink exclaimed. "He mought 'a' stole my mule! An' I didn't had no notion of watchin' dat animile like I oughter done."

"It's a pity you didn't watch the man closer," Flourney grinned. "There is a reward offered for his capture and you would have received the money."

"Hear dat now!" Ledora growled. "Read up in yo' manners book, honey, an' see whut am de properest words to say under dem succumstances."

Pink needed his book, for at that time he could think of no words, holy or profane, which would do the subject justice. Ledora was more voluble.

"Oh Lawdy!" she mourned. "Dar I sot up in my wagin wid dat ole blunderbuss scatter-gun loaded wid buck-shot across my fat legs, an' I could 'a' got de drop on dat white man an' fotch him right to town."

"You lost your chance, Ledora," Flournoy smiled. "I guess he rode the truck to the river and is hiding somewhere."

The sheriff rode back to his office. Pink and Ledora, escorted by Skeeter Butts, made a tour of the negro settlements which clustered around Tickfall like pigs around the dam, drawing their sustenance therefrom. There were many vacant cabins, for

many families had moved to the plantations for the cotton-picking season who would later return and occupy every vacant house for the winter.

Selecting from their choice of many the cabin they preferred, they borrowed the money from Skeeter and paid the month's rent in advance and then unloaded their few sticks of furniture and started in house-keeping.

Late that night Pink Duck sat up in bed, roused by the shock of a great idea.

"Whut ails you, Pinkie?" Ledora demanded. "Did a rat run over yo' face?"

"Naw!" Pink snapped. "A bright notion done run through my head."

"Shuckins," Ledora replied disgustedly. "Ef you wuz raised so durn polite, how come you don't know better dan to wake up a sleepin' lady at night wid yo' head notions."

Thereupon Pink climbed out of bed and sat upon the steps of his cabin until morning dawned.

"Ef dat ole fat nigger woman don't stop pesticatorin' me 'bout my good manners, I'll bust dat lady's head open—like a real gen'leman," he growled.

VI.

At dawn two men started from opposite points toward the same place. Kitt Starr who had ridden to the river on the truck had remained concealed in the willows, resting, eating food which he secured in the houses of colored people, purchased with money which he had fraudulently acquired from Pink Duck.

Kitt had started away from the Shongaloon store with a canvas bag full of money. He awoke beside the camp fire in the care of Pink and Ledora, and the canvas bag was missing. He remembered abandoning his automatic pistol, but he could not recall having dropped the canvas bag in his bewildered wanderings in the woods.

As his memory of all the events returned, he became convinced that he had brought his stolen treasure to the place where he had met the two negroes. He had missed it that morning about the time they had met the truck, and while the negroes had

their backs to him, he had searched their few possessions and was convinced that they were not taking the bag with them to Tick-fall.

When the truck passed, Kitt rode back to hunt for his treasure. He did not find it, and had made his way to the river, dreaming, meditating, trying to recall what he had done with the bag. His one question was: "Where is it?" He was now going back a second time to see if he could find it.

About the same time Pink Duck started for the same place; but Pink had the sheriff with him and was riding on one of Flournoy's saddle-horses.

"Yes, suh, boss," Pink asserted, as they rode along. "Dat mule trod on dat hard muddy bundle an' mighty nigh sot down on his pestle tail when it tripped him up, an' he kicked it in de bushes alongside a stump. I kin go right straight to dat spot."

"Kitt Starr may have seen the same thing and that was his reason for riding back on the truck," Flournoy suggested.

"Naw, suh, dat couldn't be. Dat Kitt didn't had his right sense when he arrived wid us. An' he wuz on de fur side of de wagon when de mule mighty nigh fell down over dat bag."

"All right. If we get the money, we'll let Kitt ramble for a while," Flournoy said.

"Ef you ever ketch him, Marse John, I hopes you'll learn him some manners," Pink said earnestly. "Dar ain't no call fer a man to be onpolite. Books is wrote to teach 'em an' dey oughter read 'em."

In the early sixties of the last century, every man and woman of color in the South was given a certain document and their feeble intelligence was informed: "By this paper, you are free." For many years the untaught slave could comprehend no more than that a printed sheet had liberated him from bondage. As a race, therefore, the colored people have inherited a reverence for the printed page which the Anglo-Saxon, familiar with literature, cannot appreciate.

Somewhere Pink Duck had begged a battered bureau from some white man's home. Hauling the treasure to his cabin, he had found in one of the drawers a

"Book of Etiquette," and this precious volume had enriched his mind for years. He had nothing else to read. In the silent swamp, infrequently visited by people from the outside world, this book furnished his only food for thought. The flesh of the sage-hen is so heavily flavored with the food it lives on that it cannot be eaten by human beings. Not otherwise, the minds of these two colored people were flavored with their food for thought, the only source of ideas being their book on good manners!

Pink Duck and Ledora had made "heap big talk" on many a lonely night in their isolated habitation over that volume, encyclopedic in its scope, covering everything—weddings, dinners, funerals, entertainments, dress, correspondence.

No one familiar with the whimsical mind of the negro can realize what fun the two derived from reading what a man should wear at an afternoon dance, how a gentleman should ask a lady to dance, what is the proper way to hold a knife and fork, how a napkin should be used and a finger-bowl, and what was the correct order of precedence for the wedding march. Their comments upon what they read were rich in humor, and their continual pondering upon the volume had created a mental atmosphere in which they dwelt and through which they moved in all phases of conduct and human relationship.

Thus it happened that Pink Duck, an ignorant, uncouth, poverty-stricken swamp negro jogging along on a sandy road in a hunt for stolen money mumbled comments on good manners into the ears of the sheriff, to the latter's bewilderment.

"If I ever catch that scoundrel, I'll teach him how to do," Flournoy answered. "In fact, I will put him where he will receive a course of instruction in conduct."

"Dar ain't no real diffunce, Marse John," Pink declared, for the sheriff had stepped upon controversial ground over which Pink and Ledora had fought many battles.

"Oh, I guess so, but we won't argue it anyhow," Flournoy said. "Where do we turn off here?"

Pink indicated the place where the ob-

scure trail entered the swamp and the two moved forward single file through eight miles of jungle undergrowth and oozy mud.

Finally they stopped beside the moist embers of Pink's old camp fire. Without hesitation, Pink walked to a certain vine-covered stump and picked up a mud-caked, canvas-covered bundle which now appeared to be surprisingly heavy in his hand.

The sheriff had not dismounted. Watching Pink curiously, he glanced down the trail, then suddenly spurred his horse and galloped away.

Pink leaped upon the top of the stump to see what was happening. For a while he saw nothing but the sheriff wheeling his horse, leaping over obstructions, tearing madly through the vines and undergrowth as if he were chasing a dodging rabbit.

Then the sheriff's big pistol cracked with startling acuteness and the sound magnified by the stillness of the great woods reverberated from tree to tree and seemed to carry to the very edge of the great jungle, like the concentric waves of water set in motion by a pebble tossed upon the surface of a calm pool where the waves break at last upon the farthest shores.

"I give up!" a voice called sharply.

Pink Duck recognized the speaker even before Kitt Starr appeared in the open with both hands uplifted in surrender.

"Dar now!" Pink Duck muttered to himself. "Dat white man didn't even speak until Marse John shot some manners outen his tough hide!"

When the two came to the spot where Pink stood beside the dead camp fire, the negro was loud in his approval of the capture.

"Good wuck, Marse John," he applauded. "Now us kin take him to town an' learn him manners. I'll git Ledora to read him some words outen my book."

The robber's blazing eyes rested for a moment on Pink Duck. If a glance could slay, Pink would now be dead. An oath snarled from Kitt Starr's throat, and seemed to linger in the air.

"Hush, white folks!" Pink remonstrated mildly. "'Tain't good manners to cuss!"



Bill of the Wild Streak

By HOWARD E. MORGAN

LIKE shoulders of dirty gray rock, irregular, ghostly under the pale moonlight, the sheep spread out over the hillside, dozing contentedly. On the crest of the short slope that was the pasture, a big gray and white dog sat watching the flock. From time to time he started off in a businesslike mahner and hurried some blundering ewe back into the moonlit open.

Ordinarily, this close attention was not necessary. Stupid though they were, most of the sheep knew better than to approach the strip of checkered shadow bordering the thicket, that was the dividing line between safety and danger. Just now, however, there were several young lambs among them, newly born, and the mothers seemed to have lost all sense of discretion. So at least Bill thought as for the tenth time he urged an obstinate ewe and her spindle legged calf away from the forest edge. Each time, this particular ewe had refused to take his fangless proddings seriously and in good part; each time she had resented his interference with her senseless plans, and

finally, she charged him, furiously, with lowered head—so quickly that, as he sprang aside, she caught him a glancing blow that almost upset him.

The big dog recovered quickly, circled swiftly about and rushed at her, silently, teeth bared. Not until within half a dozen feet of his intended victim did he realize what he was doing. It was then too late to stop. He sprang clear over the ewe and crouched panting in the shadow of a stump.

Through a necklike opening in the forest came the ring of an ax on wood. That was the man cutting kindlings for his morning fire. The big dog cowered. Whined softly. Once more he had nearly proved unfaithful to the master. For long he lay low, belly to the ground, then came erect slowly and tail between his legs, again took up his sentinellike position on the ridge top.

Bill was a mongrel, a splendid mixture of at least four fine strains; his mother was a sled dog from the Yukon, part chow, part Ungava husky with a dash of wolf blood running strongly near the surface;

his father was a collie with an interbreeding of mastiff. Bill's hair was long and thick, like a collie; he was big boned, broad chested, like a husky, his mighty jaws, wide, massive, steel muscled, were from his maternal grandsire, the wolf. What wonder, with such varying warlike strains, that violent passions fought ceaselessly for possession of his mighty body.

For long after his brush with the sheep, the dog crouched on the hilltop, motionless and limp. The wild desire that had urged him to kill, left him slowly and he was forlornly ashamed. However, it was a familiar sensation, quite. Many times before he had escaped murder by a hair's breadth. Each time it had been on account of the master.

His allegiance to Hardin knew no bounds. Once he gave way to the blood-lust and the master would be lost to him forever. Well he knew. The sheep belonged to the man. It was the man's wish that they should suffer no harm, that their foolish lives be protected at all costs. Bill had risked his own life times without number in the pursuit of duty as interpreted by his collie instincts. It was the master's wish. But this particular night, the wild urge in him refused to be readily put aside. From time to time, deep, full toned growls issued from his great throat.

The tiny scream of a bugle sounded, echoing sharply back from the purple hills. Instantly Bill was on his feet and whining eagerly. It was the man. Hardin had been a soldier. Every night he blew upon the yellow horn, a never-ending source of wonder and awe to all wilderness folk. To Bill it recalled a pile of rags and old burlap bags behind the stove where he slept through the cold winter nights. This concrete reminder of the master's nearness banished the last shreds of wildness. He barked once, sharply, joyously, then circled the herd slowly, majestically, a sedate, aloof being, competent and ready protector of the weak, a trusted friend of the master.

This streak of the killer in Bill, Hardin had often suspected. He knew dogs. But because he did know them, he trusted Bill implicitly. It was a question of his influ-

ence over the wild streak. And he had every confidence in his ability to hold the big dog's devotion.

Of one thing only was he uncertain, which was—to just what extent Bill's interbreeding had merged. As—in some people—an admixture of several races will produce an evenly balanced, intelligent whole; and in others, various racial traits will stand out distinctly—good and bad, loyalty and treachery, never merging—veritable Dr. Jekylls and Mr. Hydes; the one at times obliterating the other, the two never forming an evenly balanced, law-abiding whole—so it was with dogs.

Hardin assumed that Bill's interbreeding had struck the happy medium. Many of the most loyal and intelligent of dogs are mongrels. True Americans. Bill showed no distinctive racial traits. There was little of the wolf about him. On the surface he was dog, all dog. Home loving. Devoted to the sheep and the master. The only thing was his eyes which at times held a strange, greenish glare.

Not more than half a dozen times Hardin had surprised that wild gleam in the big dog's eyes. Each time a single word from him had banished it. But it was there, the wild streak in him, the blood lust of the killer demanding expression. But as time passed, Hardin came to think less and less about it. Bill was the best sheep dog he had ever owned.

This particular night the man did not visit the herd as was his custom. He had worked hard during the day walling up with huge stones a spring that bubbled out of the ground near the cabin—and he was very tired. He reflected pleasurably upon the fact that the little pond would save the lives of many sheep during the hot summer days—and—confident in Bill's guardianship of the growing herd—he rolled in his blankets and was soon sleeping soundly.

For long after the metallic clatter of the bugle had died away, Bill trotted back and forth along the open ridge top, tensely, joyously expectant, awaiting the arrival of the man. This nightly visit was always the occasion for a rough and tumble encounter which the dog enjoyed beyond all else. But the man did not come. Puzzle-

ment gave way to disappointment, and a great longing, not unmixed with fear, fear that the master might have gone away. Once before the man had left, without him, visiting a distant settlement; had stayed several days and Bill had experienced all the acute sufferings of a sensitive youngster deprived of its mother for the first time.

Finally, he could stand it no longer and after thrice circling the herd, thrice assuring himself that all was well, Le rushed down the valley toward the cabin. He came to a sliding stop before the closed door. Cocked his ears inquiringly, listened intently. The man was inside. Asleep. His regular breathing was clearly audible to Bill's sensitive ears. Reassured, but still vaguely dissatisfied, he trotted slowly back to the herd.

As he drew near, his step quickened. The sheep were downwind, still, a sixth sense warned him of danger. A collie would have rushed wildly forward, barking loudly. Bill advanced silently in a wide half circle along the ridge top, belly close hugging the ground, like the wolf.

It was old Graybeard, the coyote. Bill drew close without the unwelcome visitor detecting him. The dog did not really think that the coyote would attack the sheep. It was a time of plenty in the wilderness. Old Graybeard was sleek and well fed. More likely it was just deviltry. Graybeard could outrun the sheep dog.

Well he knew it. Bill knew it too. It was the coyote's delight to steal upon the unsuspecting sheep, to nip sharply right and left and then to run away, a wraithlike streak into the night; and from a near-by hillock grin down as Bill, with much frantic effort, quieted the milling herd.

Sometimes Bill took this as a joke. Sometimes he went into a rage. Depending upon his state of mind. To-night—deprived of the softening influence of his frolic with the man—he was angry. Graybeard knew Bill was away and took his time. No sport in a practical joke if the jokee is not there to appreciate it.

He nipped tentatively at a gangling white figure that practically fell over him where he crouched in a bed of huckleberry bushes. The lamb, a very young one,

bawled frantically. The nip had been as nothing at all. Graybeard was surprised. But his surprise was many times multiplied when a ewe, usually the most timid of creatures, charged him wildly, quite disregarding his menacing front.

At the last moment he danced nimbly aside. Unfortunately for all concerned, however, the ewe's splay foot slid from off a moss-covered bowlder; she lurched sideways, fell, and in falling, knocked Graybeard neatly off his feet. With a snarl of rage he sprang forward and buried his yellow fangs in her throat.

At the climax of the tragedy, Bill was no more than a dozen yards away. He lay stretched flat to the ground among some low-lying shrubs. His big body was vibrant with righteous rage. Still, he did not move. Well he knew that, at his first motion, the coyote would flee. And he might never catch him. Many times he had tried and failed.

Graybeard raised his bloody muzzle and tested the stilly air. It told him nothing. Bill had worked about downwind. The coyote was not particularly hungry, but having killed he intended to eat. He worried savagely at the dead sheep. Bill stole forward, noiseless as a shadow. The coyote took alarm suddenly. But not quite quickly enough. Even as he sprang away, Bill was upon him.

Wily old battler that he was, Graybeard was no match for this hundred pounds of enraged dogflesh. A single flashing downward stroke of the wolflike fangs ripped the coyote from shoulder to gullet—and the fight was over.

For long the victor crouched over the dead body of the coyote, growling deep in his throat, the light of battle in his eyes. Then the bleating of the sheep roused him to a sense of duty. The herd had scattered in all directions over the hillside. He rounded them up in his usual efficient manner, but they refused to be quieted. He threatened them savagely. Even nipped them more severely than usual, but all to no avail. They persisted in stampeding wildly, rushing head on into stumps and bowlders and into each other in their excitement.

Bill finally guessed the reason for this continued panic. The dead coyote. The odor of blood. First, he dragged the body of the coyote to the edge of a gravel banked coulee at the foot of the slope and pushed it in. Then he caught upon the dead sheep. The ewe's body was still warm. For the first time in his life he got a taste of fresh, sweet mutton. He licked his jaws pleurably. Instantly the wolf in him came to the surface. His eyes shone with a strange greenish glare. He looked upon the milling mass of sheep with new eyes, hungry eyes. The dead ewe was not for him. He would make his own kill. Slowly, cautiously, he crept toward the herd.

Suddenly a shrill whistle sounded. The man. The sheep had awakened him with their bawling. Bill froze to the ground. Again the whistle sounded, nearer this time. Bill whined uncertainly. The wild desire left him. And as the man's tall figure appeared on the naked ridge top, he loped forward slowly to meet him. The man eyed him suspiciously in the half darkness.

"What's goin' on here, you big, no-account bum?"

But his voice was not angry. Bill waved his bushy tail and made gruff, loving noises in his throat. But he did not come near the outstretched hand. Instead he turned away abruptly down the hill, ears and tail drooping. The man followed, puzzled.

"Somethin's wrong here, sure enough. The old pup ain't hisself—" And then—"Sure, I'll betcha, 'becuz I didn't come an' see him t'night."

Hardin laughed. But in his assumption, this time, he was not correct. Bill was facing a situation totally unprecedented in his brief existence. He didn't know just how the man would take it. The fact that he had not killed the sheep did not occur to him as a saving grace. He felt as guilty as though he had actually done the deed. And he was quite sure that the man would know that he had intended to kill. The man knew all things. There was no deceiving him.

Bill was sorry. Thoroughly ashamed. And just a bit frightened. The man would beat him, of course. He might shoot at him as he did at the coyotes. Drive him

away from the cabin perhaps. This last was what brought about the dejection.

But he had no thought of evading the issue. He led the way straight to the dead sheep.

After a brief inspection the man swore and shook his head sadly.

"Damn it all, I was afraid of it."

"C'mere, you worthless houn' dog."

Bill drooped in every muscle, but he did not cringe. For long Hardin eyed the big dog.

"Git out you—I'm through with you. Git—!"

He caught up a loose stone and poised it above his head. The dog did not move. A lump rose in the man's throat. "Git—Git, I tell you—!" He waved the rock menacingly. He hated to do it, but—

Bill whined and turned suddenly away. He stopped on the edge of the coulee and whined again. The man hesitated, then dropped the rock and caught up a handful of dry grass from a dead bog, lit it and peered down. He saw the body of the coyote.

"Doggone—I should have known, Bill; you didn't kill that there sheep. The herd wouldn't have got so wild unless it had been a coyote 'r a bear 'r somethin'. Doggone, now, ain't I ashamed. Sure enough purty nigh plugged you, too, didn't I? C'mere, boy—"

II.

In the days that followed, the dog and the man were inseparable, made much of each other, like friends reunited after a serious misunderstanding. Under these pleasant conditions Bill experienced no recurrence of the wild streak. In constant touch with the man, the dog in him was always uppermost.

His thoughts revolved about the man, followed interestedly his every action. Construction of the little pond seemed to him a foolish thing, but he knew that there was some good reason for it. The man apparently wasted his time on many foolish things, but always, sooner or later, an adequate reason for them developed. So it would be with the pond.

And one hot day in early summer, the

man's wisdom was made manifest. The heat was intense. The sun a vivid red ball in a saffron sky. Man, dog and sheep sweltered helplessly. It was then that the man helped Bill drive the sheep around the base of the ridge to the pond. They floundered in the cool water to their hearts' content all the rest of the day.

One night at dusk a short, white-skinned man made his appearance at the little cabin. He made much of Bill, but the latter accepted his advances unemotionally; remained briskly, unresponsively aloof. The white-skinned man meant nothing to him. He didn't understand him in the first place. And then again, he was just a bit jealous. As a friend of the master, however, the man was, of course, to be treated with the greatest respect.

Well he knew that to obey the frequent urge to nip the visitor's inexperienced fingers as they rubbed his ears the wrong way, was to bring the master's instant displeasure. The two men talked much together. The visitor stayed on and on and with the passing of each day the master became more and more preoccupied and Bill grew correspondingly depressed. He whined dismally on the ridge top through the long, hot nights. Something unpleasant was going to happen. And it did. On the fourth night the bugle did not sound. Next morning, the cabin was deserted. Bill did not know it, of course, but the man's little homestead lay in the center of valuable timber country; the white-skinned man had been negotiating for its purchase and Hardin had gone to town to consummate the deal. All he knew was that the master had gone and that he was very, very lonesome.

All of the next day and night he circled the herd like an automaton, time and again rushing away to the cabin, whining dismally before the door.

He became nervous and crochety. On the second night he picked a quarrel with a wolverine and was severely mauled. He even disputed the right of way with a pink-nosed porcupine and collected half a dozen barbed quills for his pains. Most of these quills came to rest in his upper forelegs; after much painful worrying, he pulled them out with his teeth. A couple, how-

ever, worked into his wrinkled snout and defied his most heroic efforts.

It may have been the lack of contact with the man; it may have been the porcupine quills that festered and rendered him feverish with pain and rage—most likely a combination of both—at any rate—on the third night after the man had left—the old craving to kill came upon him in a flood of sentient desire that would not be denied. A big ewe gave birth to a gangling lamb in a cluster of oak scrub on the forest edge. All of his efforts to drive her back into the herd and safety, were unavailing. Finally, enraged, he rushed silently upon her.

Five minutes later, four dead sheep bore irrefragable evidence of his lustful efforts. The murders done, he slunk away into the forest, swiftly, silently, furtively, like the wolf. But—in his going was none of the arrogant bearing of his rapacious forebear. The passion to kill left him as suddenly as it had come. He went—tail between his legs, head drooping, like a dog. And he knew that he might never return.

III.

HOURS later, Hardin entered upon the scene of carnage. It did not need sight of the bloody jowled creature that slunk guiltily away into the thicket upon his approach, to tell him the name of the murderer. He knew. All about were tracks. Dog tracks. Bill's tracks.

The man swore in a frightful manner. His face was white with rage. His business in town had not turned out well; he was tired and hungry and hot—there were other troubles, too; and now—this. The rifle leaped to his shoulder. Five shots followed the slinking figure of his erstwhile friend into the thicket. And he laughed when a yelp of pain told him that one of his shots, at least, had found its mark.

In his heart the man was kind and it is doubtful if he would have nursed his hard feelings against the erring dog if it had not been for his other troubles; the girl back in the States, for instance, who had married another; and the lumber people who were trying to rob him. The man was the sort that sours under difficulties. It seemed

that every one and everything was against him.

Alone with his thoughts, he longed for an opportunity to give vent to his vengeful feelings. Of his real and fancied enemies, Bill was nearest at hand. Hence it was that he carried his long rifle with him wherever he went, hoping ever for a chance shot at his unfaithful friend.

Hardin knew dogs and he felt sure that Bill could not stay away for long. One day—he would come back. When he did—the rifle would be ready at hand. In the man's hardened heart there was no room for clemency; to his mind, the renegade sheep dog was no different from any other killer of sheep—the coyote or the wolf. In fact, he was worse, if anything.

From a neighbor, Hardin purchased another sheep dog, a lazy old collie called Stub—Stub because a bear trap had claimed all but six inches of his bushy tail. The collie was a good enough sheep dog as sheep dogs go, but his cringing docility found no response in the man's spirited nature.

The random shot from the man's rifle had torn a deep groove along Bill's ribs. The wound did not respond readily to his frequent cleansings, festered and would not heal. For several days he was very ill, lay close hidden in the alder swamp. He reverted naturally to a health giving diet of tansy and coarse grasses.

At the end of a week the wound began to heal. So also did his sore nose. And with the first sign of returning good health came an irresistible yearning to return to the old life.

The whispering silences of the alder swamp appalled him. He was restless and nervous. He longed for the sheep; they had become a part of his very self. He longed for the cabin, the heap of old burlap bags behind the stove, the bits of fish and half-cooked meat; but above all, he longed for the little things—the boisterous rompings, the kind words, the rough caress—which only the man, his man, could bestow.

Came a night when he crawled out of his hiding place and made his way slowly, uncertainly toward the pasture. He was still

very weak. Tottered when he walked. At first glimpse of the fat old dog, Stub, he flew into a great rage. If his strength had permitted he would at once have challenged the collie to battle. But discretion fortunately prevailed. He merely crouched low at the edge of the thicket, teeth bared in a perpetual snarl—and watched.

Every night thereafter, he occupied the same spot among the gray shadows bordering the swamp. He saw the man inspecting the flock and growled lovingly. But sight of the rifle brought him to his senses. The man would shoot him—he knew.

When Hardin returned to the cabin he trailed along—at a distance. With ears cocked inquiringly, head on one side, he followed longingly the man's preparations for supper. Later, when the cabin was in darkness, he stole forward furtively and searched for scraps. He found only a large strip of pork rind which ordinarily he would have ignored. But now—he swallowed it gratefully and hunted for more. With the coming of night he returned to the pasture and during the few short hours of darkness, unseen, unsuspected, assisted Stub in guarding the herd.

But with the complete return of his strength, this vicarious enjoyment of things once his own, did not satisfy. Came a night when he openly fronted the collie on the ridge top. The latter was game and flew clumsily at Bill's throat. Bill easily evaded him. The tussle was brief and bloodless. Bill could easily have killed the collie; instead, he merely rolled him over on his back and fastened his great teeth gently but firmly in the other's throat, barely breaking the skin.

Stub saw the light. The fight went out of him. Thereafter the herd was Bill's. He might have killed to his heart's content had he so desired. But there was nothing further from his thoughts. Instead he took over his old job. Stub soon came to take these nightly visits as a matter of course, and slept peacefully on his favorite bed of pine needles while Bill watched the sheep.

And then one day Bill came face to face with the man. From the summit of a grassy knoll Bill had espied the familiar figure and had circled about in a wide arc

to come in behind him without being seen. He was curious, as always, to know what the master was about. He felt sure that the man would follow the beaten path through the swamps. But he didn't. Hence it was that they came face to face in a grassy, open glade flanked by a dense thicket of alder.

By not so much as a quiver of his bushy tail did the big dog betray the conflicting emotions pounding through his tense body. Only his eyes softened, doglike, with mute appeal when he saw the anger that was in the man's heart suddenly reflected in the sun browned face.

Hardin, fortunately for the dog, had left his rifle at the cabin. Mumbling to himself he searched the ground for a loose rock or a stick, but finding neither he drew his knife, cut a sturdy sapling and set about fashioning it into a club. Bill did not move. He sensed uncertainty in the man's actions. Truth to tell, Hardin was hoping that the dog would go away. He trimmed the heavy stick in a most leisurely manner, then, as the dog still remained motionless, he advanced determinedly and with fixed purpose, club raised.

But his heart somehow wasn't in it. He swung wildly. Missed purposely. The dog's thick roach hair lifted automatically. He snarled. Involuntarily. Not in anger. But this outward indication of defiance was enough to rekindle the man's smoldering rage. Next time, the club found its mark, again, and still again. The dog made no sound, but backed away slowly under the shower of blows, into the thicket, lips still lifted in a fixed snarl, but with a questioning, appealing look in his eyes that, despite all, tempered the force that lay behind the club.

Following the encounter, Hardin was sheepishly displeased with himself, ashamed, like a man after too severely beating a youngster in a fit of anger. He left off carrying the rifle, knowing in his heart that he would not shoot the dog if he had the chance. As a matter of fact he rather hoped that Bill would one day come back to him. He convinced himself readily that the dog had learned its lesson, would never again become a killer. For witness—the sheep

were still there; lazy old Stub would have proved of little hindrance if the big wolf dog had really wanted another taste of fresh mutton.

That appealing look in his old friend's eyes haunted the man for days.

IV.

THE sultry dog days of August brought distress in varying degrees to all wilderness folk. There had been no rain for weeks. A dry blight struck all green things; the poplar leaves turned prematurely yellow and fell away; the hardy wire grass in the pasture became brown and dry. Unfit even for the sheep. With Stub's help, Hardin drove the herd a mile farther down the valley where the feed was somewhat better.

The swamp itself, usually a summer paradise for all water loving animals, was but a morass of tangled roots and tinder dry bogs, surrounded by odorous pools of fetid green slime. On the upland slopes the rabbits perished by the thousand. The shortage of food and water drove many mountain dwellers to the lowlands. Several gaunt and silent moose visited Kootenai Swamp, searched eternally among the few remaining mudholes for lily roots. Many wolves, lions, bear, caribou, deer, and hosts of lesser animals, all left their footprints in the newly formed runway leading to the man's pond which was the only running water for miles about.

An ever growing restless uncertainty, attended by a corresponding shortening of temper, affected all the beasts alike. This unsettled state of mind brought about many bloody quarrels. A caribou bull and a big cougar staged a battle to the death in Kootenai Swamp not a quarter of a mile from the cabin. A black bear and a silver-tip grizzly fought on the ridge top near the old pasture.

As might be expected, the sheep formed an irresistible attraction for the hungry visitors. One and all, singly and in pairs, they investigated with longing eyes. One and all, they gauged the chances involved in breaking through the guard of that confident, competent appearing beast—that was

neither dog nor wolf, yet bigger and more menacing than either—whose watchful eyes seemed never to close.

Each one was duly impressed. The wisest among them decided to devote their efforts for the time being to easier, if less palatable, prey. There were still plenty of rabbits scattered in the neighborhood of the lowlands.

It devolved upon a young cougar, arrogant with the inexperience and optimism of youth, to make the first attempt. For hours he lay well hidden in the crotch of a long limbed beech tree not a dozen yards from the huddled flock of sheep. Bill knew he was there, had known it from the first, but he made no sign. After waiting half the night for the cougar to declare his intentions he purposely allowed an arbitrary old ram, who could take care of himself if the exigency demanded, to wander near the beech tree.

The cougar sprang. But his claws never so much as touched the ram. Bill was upon him before he struck the ground. Luckily perhaps for the dog, the cougar was young and unskilled in the niceties of mixed warfare. At any rate, the hissing, growling, clutching combatants soon fell apart, disclosing the lion stretched out at full length—quite dead. Outside of a few scratches, Bill was uninjured.

Came a night when the prevailing nervous uncertainty among the wilderness peoples broke out suddenly into frantic hysteria. Great and small, they rushed wildly here and there in apparently aimless, panic-stricken flight. The thickets were filled with strange noises. Flocks of birds, squawking and screaming, shrilled overhead, all tending toward the east.

The gray night air was hazy, stiflingly hot, despite a lively breeze. The western sky reflected a dull pinkish glow. Even Stub, roused from his perpetual nap, sniffed the air and whined querulously up at the heavens. Bill circled the restless herd at a swinging lope, nose high in air, listening intently, striving to learn what it was all about. Something was wrong, he knew. But what? It was that which puzzled him.

A miniature whorl of wind dropping

down out of the sky gave him the answer. Fire. Although he had never before been through a forest fire, he realized instinctively its menace. His first thought was of the sheep. It was up to him to protect them. Alone, unencumbered by responsibility, he would have sought out the nearest body of water. This through no conscious mental effort; instinct merely, dictating that this was the thing to do. Every other living thing experienced the same vital urge. So it was that with swift, sure maneuvering, he turned the unwieldy herd of milling sheep toward that spot where lay the cabin—and the man's pond.

Hardin was awakened by the excited bleating of the sheep. He caught up the rifle and hurried outside, assured that something was wrong.

The sight that met his eyes brought furious curses to his lips. The cabin faced the east and was located at the base of a fifty foot bank of shale, so that he got no warning of the oncoming wall of fire which already tinged the western sky with coruscant flares of scarlet and yellow. Nor did he at once identify the pungent odor that accompanied the hot breeze. The sum total of his first impression was a bawling, straggling mass of wild eyed sheep harassed by a savage dog whose jowls and body were streaked with blood. Even as he watched, Bill charged a persistently wayward ewe silently and furiously; she careened wildly to one side, crashed into the oncoming herd. Several sheep piled over her. Bill dived into the struggling mass, growling fiercely, nipping sharply with his great teeth. Speed at that very moment was the principal thing.

Even now the flames were licking along the ridge top. Bill knew. There was no time to spare. But Hardin did not know. He thought only that the dog had again turned killer. The rifle spat fire, once—twice. At the first shot Bill's feet flew from under him. He hurtled forward, nose burrowing into the sand. The second shot found its mark as he lay writhing on the ground.

Mumbling incoherently with rage, Hardin hurried after the sheep. And then, abruptly—he felt the hot breath of the fire

—caught the vivid reflection in the sky. A dead tree on the near horizon burst suddenly into flames. The man was stunned for a moment. Then understanding came to him.

Bill had not turned killer. Instead, he had saved the sheep. And that, too, strange to say, in the face of the fire. But now—he was dead.

A lump rose in the man's throat. Remorse filled his heart. The flames were now raging along the ridge top in plain sight and in the sudden glare he made out the big dog hitching painfully along the ground toward the cabin. The man was glad. He cried out happily. Waved his gun. Called encouragingly. Once in the cabin the dog would be safe. Of this he was certain. The flames would split on either side of the cliff, thus avoiding the cabin altogether.

Most of the sheep were already in the water urged by Stub's lumbering efforts. By the time Hardin had thrust the last reluctant lamb into the pond the flames were sweeping up from the swamp, accompanied by flame shot billows of acrid smoke.

The heat was stifling. The man sprawled close to the ground. The blistering heat waves seared his body like hot irons. And then—as a smoke cloud lifted—he saw—the unexpected had happened. The cabin was in flames. And—the injured dog was in the cabin.

Without an instant's hesitation the man sprang into action. He scrambled into the pool, drenched his few clothes thoroughly, then, bending low, ran toward the cabin. Before the door he fell, gasping and coughing. Dropped face down in the sand and with his first full breath, called out encouragingly: "Stay put, old times—I'm a comin'."

The cabin door had blown shut and as he kicked it open a gust of flame enveloped him. Again he dropped to the ground and rolled over and over in frantic effort to extinguish his burning clothing. Ignoring his many burns the man pushed on into the cabin.

Bill lay behind the big Yukon stove on his old bed of burlap bags. His beautiful

body was smeared with blood from his battle with the cougar and the man's bullets. His eyes were half closed. He was breathing with difficulty in short, choking gasps. The man crawled to him over the dirt floor. Sank exhausted. Roused as the hungry flames licked his smoke blackened face, lifted the dog in his arms and stumbled out almost exhausted, through the flame filled doorway.

Crouching in the pool, the big dog still in his arms, with no thought of his own hurts Hardin took stock of Bill's injuries. One of the bullets had broken a foreleg, the other had torn a ragged hole through the thick muscles of the neck. Painful, not necessarily fatal. Hardin was well versed in rough surgery. While the roaring of the fire diminished in the distance and the sheep one by one floundered out of the steaming pool, he prepared splints for the broken leg, and as he worked he talked:

"I didn't mean t' do it, ol' pup. Honest. Don't know what I was thinkin' of—wy, doggone, if I had a mite o' sense I would of known. But you know me, Bill—I ain't got no more brains that a—than a—than one o' them sheep. Yeah, that's right—I ain't got no more sense than a sheep—an' you an' me knows as how that ain't much. But this is what I was goin' t' tell you—me an' you is goin' away. Yeah, sure enough. I sold these here sheep t' Sam Dodd. You remember Sam. Kinda wisht I'd sold t' them lumber fellers now—the skunks—wouldn't we have the laugh on 'em, after this; serve 'em right, too. Anyhow, you an' me is goin' away, like I said—away up yender some place—where they ain't no sheep. Jest you an' me—that's the life, eh, pup—jest you an' me—"

Some things the man said were a bit confusing. Never before had he made such a long speech; but his words were kind. The gist of it was quite clear. All was forgiven. All was well. And despite his many hurts, Bill was very happy. To show that he was in sympathetic agreement with whatever the master had in mind, he wiggled his tail feebly and reached for the man's smoke blackened face with his tongue.



Delirium Trimmings.

By KATHARINE BRUSH

PLEASE imagine for a moment that you are a signboard or a gasoline pump or something, and like one, stand stationary at the side of the highway while the famous Mr. Minot goes by. You see that snorting monster of a roadster, don't you? And you note the hatless handsome brunette head peeping above the roadster's wheel? Well, *that* is Mr. Minot.

He has been famous for years. He became famous long before any one thought of calling him "Mr.," as being the worst little boy who ever tied the pigtails of little girls to the backs of their seats at school. Later he was famous because he could kick a football farther, and win a lady faster than probably anybody else. And now he is famous for the number of times he has been arrested for speeding, the number of motor cars he owns in which to speed, and the number of millions his father left him with which to buy—motor cars.

Please observe, however, that Mr. Minot on this particular occasion is proceeding along the highway at a leisurely clip for once. It will take a full two minutes instead of the usual six seconds for him to

disappear from your sight. And in the meantime you will have had opportunity to observe the girl in the coupé just ahead of him. And to make your own deductions.

The girl in the coupé had blond hair under a wee hat, and lips like a scarlet letter O. Larry Minot didn't know who she was, but he wanted to. Wherefore he drove behind her very slowly for several miles, staring ahead. Now and then, because variety is the spice of life, he passed her and rode ahead for several miles, staring back. And occasionally, when the highway was clear, he rode beside her, and smiled.

It appeared that these tactics were getting him nowhere, except geographically. The girl declined to smile in return. She kept the scarlet mouth pursed firmly, and the eyes fixed on the road, and her whole attitude was forcibly and unmistakably "Don't-talk-to-the-motorman."

Of a sudden she stepped on the accelerator, and the coupé jumped forward. The roadster obediently jumped after it. Larry Minot, chuckling, kept one eye on the girl,

the other on his mounting speedometer. Fifty. Fifty-five. Sixty. Sixty-five. The little devil could handle a car, so much was certain!

"Is she trying to get away from me, I wonder?" reflected Larry Minot. He drew abreast of her and continued thus for a moment, tooting his horn by way of greeting and applause.

What happened then Larry Minot has reason to remember rather vividly, but how it happened he doesn't understand to this day. All he knows is that there was a terrific cannon ball sort of a crash, followed closely by a series of bumps and thumps, the whole culminating in silence deep, utter, and strangely full of shimmering pyrotechnics.

He opened his eyes. Well, the heavens hadn't fallen, anyhow. They were still there, exceeding blue and calm, just as he had left them. But he—where was he? Lying on his back in a swamp, it appeared.

He sat up laboriously. Wheels! Wheels in the air, spinning very slowly, slower all the time! Wheels of a little coupé—

Somehow he got to his feet. "Are you hurt?" he cried as he plunged through the swamp. "Are you all right?"

She was most decidedly not all right. He found her caught inside the overturned machine, huddled there grotesquely. With feverish speed he pulled her out, laid her on the ground, listened at her heart. He could hear its faint fluttering message. Not dead, then! Thank God for that. He lifted her tenderly and staggered up the steep embankment to the road, pausing there a moment to get his bearings.

A hurried glance to left and right disclosed no human being in sight, no car approaching from either direction. He saw his own roadster, leaning drunkenly against a tree at the very edge of the bank. It looked as though a breath might dislodge it from this precarious perch and send it crashing down to join the coupé in the swamp.

"Ticklish business to get 'er off there," Larry said, thinking aloud, "even providing the engine will start, which I doubt. Safest and quickest thing to do is walk, I guess. There must be a house pretty soon."

There was a house, just beyond the next concealing clump of trees—a house with a big front yard unbelievably full of chickens and children. At the stumbling approach of Mr. Larry Minot and his remarkable armful, the children gazed in stupefaction. Then one of them, a barefoot boy with coat of tan and trimmings of freckles, recovered himself sufficiently to turn and run up the path among the scattering fowl. As he ran he shouted, "Mom! Mom! Here comes somebody sick!" in the tone he usually reserved for nothing less than circus parades.

Mom and Larry reached the front porch simultaneously, the one wiping soap-suddy hands on a checkered apron, the other reminding himself savagely that his legs must not obey that impulse and give way—not for a minute or so at least. He put the unconscious girl in a convenient hammock, gasped, "She's hurt—auto smash-up—get a doctor—" and then the checkered apron, and the barefoot boy, and the girl, and the universe at large all lurched away from him into oblivion.

II.

"HERE's her pocketbook, doctor," observed Mom later. "Little purse or somethin'. I found it hid in her stockin'."

"Open it," said the doctor from his place beside the bed. "There may be something in it that 'll help us to identify her."

Mom fumbled in the purse as directed, and at length fished forth a slip of paper. "Ann Winthrop Hale," she spelled out frowningly. "Commonwealth Avenue, Boston. Telephone Back Bay 9999. An' my! Look at all this money!"

"Put the money with her things," said the doctor, "and give me that paper. I'll telephone Back Bay whatever-it-is as soon as I'm through here, and tell the person who answers that these two are going to come out all right. The man's pretty well bunged up, cuts and bruises, but no bones broken as far as I can see. He'll be good as new in a little while. The girl has a broken leg, and of course she's bruised, too. Must have been quite a spill they had."

"Yes, sir!" Mom nodded emphatically.

"My boy Georgie—he's the oldest of my seven—he went to look while you was puttin' on them bannages, an' he come back an' told me it's just awful! They was in a little black shut-in car, an' it's lyin' on its top this minute, twenty feet below the road. Wonder they wasn't kilt." She stood looking down at the white unconscious faces, one on the bed, one on a couch drawn up near it. "My, my!" she added. "An' him such a pretty man, too, an' her so little an' sweet an' all. Maybe new-married folks, eh, doctor?"

"Maybe," answered the doctor. He lifted the slim left hand of his feminine patient. There was a platinum circle on its third finger. "Married, anyway," he concluded. "How did the accident happen, do you know that? Did they hit another car or something?"

"There warn't no other car around anywhere, Georgie says," declared Georgie's mother. "So they must of just nachelly went over."

All of which, in brief, was communicated to the ear of the gentleman who responded when the doctor called Back Bay 9999 somewhat later. In this wise:

"Hello, Back Bay 9999? Do you know a young woman by the name of Ann Winthrop Hale? Oh, your daughter, is it? Well, I'm sorry to tell you she's been a little hurt—not badly, no, not at all serious—automobile accident on the Newburyport Turnpike—I'm Dr., Bryan, been attending them. Bruises and a broken leg, and the young man, her husband, I suppose? Yes, I thought so. Well, he'll be O. K. in a little while. We don't know yet exactly how it did happen. They must have skidded. No, not a collision, apparently, unless the other car escaped unharmed and made away. Yes, I agree with you, a hospital would be the best place. You will? Good! I'll stay with them until you get here."

There followed directions as to the exact location of the farmhouse and how to reach it. Then Dr. Bryan hung up the receiver and returned to his post at the bedside. "That was the girl's father," he told Mom. "He'll be out here as soon as he can get here, with an ambulance. He wants to

take them back to Boston to a hospital there."

The girl's father arrived just as Larry Minot was struggling back to some semblance of lucidity. His pudgy form in the doorway was the first object upon which the eyes of Larry lit, and words of his were the first Larry heard. Astounding words. Preposterous, wholly unbelievable words.

"They were just married at ten o'clock this morning," he was saying. And as he said it he indicated the couch and the bed and their occupants with a sweep of his hand.

The occupant of the couch was then seen to raise his head to peer at the occupant of the bed, and to blink rapidly several times. The doctor, noting these signs of returning vigor, moved to stand over him, holding his wrist in professional fingers.

"How are you?" he asked.

"I'm insane," Larry assured him.

"Oh, no, you're not!" smiled the doctor.

"You're all right. Pain anywhere?"

"Pain—" began Larry, and paused. There were pains all over him, and to mention any single one of them seemed useless. He turned to address the pudgy man who now stood eying him curiously. "Did I understand you to say that I was married at ten o'clock this morning, sir?" he asked politely.

"That's what I said."

"Who—who'd I marry?"

The pudgy man glanced with pardonable uneasiness at the doctor. "Why, you married my daughter Ann, of course!" he presently replied.

"Oh," said Larry. Like a child memorizing a lesson he repeated it over slowly. "I married your daughter Ann at ten o'clock this morning. I married—" he broke off suddenly, and looked again at the girl on the bed near by. "Is this your daughter Ann?" he demanded.

Pudgy nodded, in obvious dismay. His lips moved wordlessly. "Delirious?" they seemed to query of the doctor.

"Ten o'clock this morning," mused Larry. "Funny! I could swear I was playing golf at Brae Burn at ten o'clock this morning! Er—my wife—she's ill?"

"You had an automobile accident," the

doctor put in, watching Larry's face closely. "Don't you remember? You were driving north in a coupé, the two of you, and you skidded. Didn't you?"

"Oh, is that what we did?" murmured Larry. "I wasn't sure. You see, she was going pretty fast, and I went to pass her, and the next I knew we were both at the foot of the bank. She was still in her car, but I must have been thrown out of mine, because I found it a minute later hanging to a tree beside the road—"

The doctor interrupted him. "Here, take this," he commanded, and thrust a thermometer between his lips. "Lie still, and don't try to talk any more for a while."

Both men went out then. Larry could hear them conversing in the hallway beyond the door, assisted by two voices new to him, a woman's and a small boy's.

It was all rather confusing. The small boy appeared to be insisting that no car was hanging to a tree beside the road, nor in fact had any car hung to any tree beside any road, ever, within the realms of his entire experience. The woman was abetting him in this absurd untruthfulness with cries of "Georgie knows! Georgie seen the place an' looked all around."

The pudgy man, too. He kept maintaining that there couldn't have been any other car, anyway; of course they were both in the same car; the coupé; he had given it to his daughter on her birthday; and why should a bride and groom only married since ten o'clock this morning be riding in separate cars, could any one tell him that?

No one apparently could, and he added in triumph that the fellow must have hit his head on a rock and gone dippy.

Larry, recognizing himself as "the fellow" and being a person inherently fond of winning an argument, removed the thermometer from his mouth long enough to call out, "I *told* you I was, in the first place!"

Whereupon he and the girl were borne forth on stretchers and shoved into an ambulance and carted in haste to Boston.

III.

It was some days before he saw her again. It was some days, in fact, before he

saw anything but crackling white starched nurses and busy physicians and pale green walls and more thermometers and liquid food on successive trays.

His injuries had proved more serious than had been at first supposed. Internal ones, or something. He didn't quite know what they were, but he knew very well that whatever they were, they weren't of sufficient moment to necessitate his remaining prone and passive all this while.

Every morning at seven fifteen he firmly announced his intention of getting up immediately, and putting on his clothes, and going home. By noon, daily, they had managed with threats and promises to wean him temporarily from this purpose. And from noon on he fussed and fumed and uttered mighty imprecations, and meditated on what he positively *would* do, come what might, at seven fifteen of the morning to follow.

A person referring to herself as "your wife's nurse" called upon him at punctual intervals during these days to report the progress of "your wife." She was, he inferred, doing nicely. "Your father-in-law is on his way to see you," he was informed one day, and the pudgy person himself appeared hard on the heels of the announcement.

Larry still felt sure that the pudgy person was *not* his father-in-law, and that the pudgy person's daughter was *not* his wife, and to this conviction he clung like a barnacle on a wave-washed rock. But, perhaps also like the barnacle, he recognized the futility of debating with the waves. He just clung, and said nothing. When the pudgy person remarked jocosely that he certainly had suffered a total lapse of memory at the time of the accident, Larry agreed that he certainly had, and let it go at that.

Then, one sensational afternoon, he was told that his wife was in a wheel-chair on the sun-porch, and that he, in another wheel-chair, might be pushed out to join her. His enthusiasm over the prospect filled his romantic nurse with sympathetic tenderness.

"He's simply wild to see her!" she told herself.

"Now I'll find out what this is all about!" Larry was telling himself at the same time.

The girl in the wheel-chair seemed to him even lovelier than the girl in the coupé had seemed. She wore a lacy negligée and, as outer wrapping, a blue blanket. Incredible that that blanket had been chosen to keep just any old sick person warm, and not expressly to match this particular person's eyes! She greeted him gravely, without smiling. "Hello," she said.

"Hello," responded Larry.

The nurse withdrew, disappointed. Here was no proper way for reunited honeymooners to behave! She left them quite alone on the sun-porch.

"Funny, isn't it?" Larry began. "Those 'hellos' are the first words either of us has ever heard the other one say, and here I'm told we are married!"

"We're not married," Ann told him succinctly.

"That's a relief!" sighed Larry.

The blue eyes sparked suddenly, and Ann laughed. She had a most engaging laugh. Throat-deep, contralto. It begged you to join it, and so you did. Larry did, anyway.

"Such a gallant speech!" she murmured. "Couldn't you even pretend to be a little sorry?"

"Of course I'm sorry in some ways," Larry said composedly. "What man wouldn't be? But it is a relief to know that one didn't do something one hasn't the remotest memory of ever having done. It props up a tottering faith in one's own mentality."

"It would," agreed the girl. She eyed him sideways, speculatively. "You must be in a complete daze about the whole affair."

"To put it mildly," added Larry to this.

"Listen, then, and I'll try to explain."

Larry grasped the wheels of his chair and manipulated them so that he was turned to squarely face her. "Go on," he commanded then.

"Well," said Ann, "you're not married, as I told you. At least not to me. But I—" she hesitated, a little scowl etching the paper-white of her forehead. "I'd better start over again," she decided.

"My name is Ann Hale, and I live with my father in a house on Commonwealth Avenue. I haven't any mother. She died when I was three. Well, ever since then dad and I have been the best chums imaginable—until recently. Then he got it into his head to marry me off to a certain man, a business acquaintance of his. Of course I couldn't *endure* him! He was the kind of a man who usually marries the kind of a woman who wears boudoir caps when she goes motoring, if you know what I mean. Well, anyway, dad and I had quite a rumpus about it, and finally I started playing around with another man whom I knew he objected to, just for the sake of revenge. Parker Peterson, his name was—is. He's rather attractive in a Rudolph Valentino sort of way, and has a simply fascinating reputation for dark deeds of various sorts. Dad has never seen him in his life, to my knowledge, but he's heard all about him long ago, and he absolutely forbade me ever to have anything to do with him. Of course, when he began to annoy me about this other man, Parker was the first person I turned to."

"Of course!" approved Larry Minot. Just what he would have done under the circumstances, just exactly.

"This was several months ago," Ann continued. "Parker was very wonderful to me all that time. He kept telling me about his past and begging me to marry him and 'make a man of him.' You know, the old stuff. I should have known it never works out right—I've certainly read enough books and seen enough movies dealing with the subject to know—but I didn't. I actually believed that any day we stood up and had the well-known words mumbled over us, reformation and renaissance would instantly set in and Parker would grow a halo. The idea of bringing this about rather appealed to me, and so, at ten o'clock on the morning of the day you and I—er—ran into each other, I went down to a justice of the peace to marry him."

At this point Larry Minot found himself not liking the story any too well—and wondering vaguely why.

"I didn't tell anybody," Ann went on. "Not a soul. Dad left for the office at

eight thirty that morning as usual, and when I went out about an hour later I left a note for him, telling him I was going to be married at ten o'clock. That's all I told him. I fully intended mentioning who it was I was to marry, but in my excitement I left out that unimportant detail, and never thought of it at all until afterward.

"I knew he wouldn't get the note until he came home at noon, so I left it where he'd see it and off I went merrily in my coupé—you know the coupé—"

"Yes," grinned Larry. "Yes, I know."

"Well, how it happened I can't imagine, but *who* should get wind of the wedding and come tearing in to break it up but *Parker's wife*! It seems he had one, not divorced or anything, though of course he had never given me any inkling of her existence. He was standing there, showing me the ring—the proceedings weren't to start for a couple of minutes—and I had it on my finger, seeing if it would fit, when she came in. She screeched something about 'He can't marry you, he's my husband, he belongs to me,' and waved a marriage license in a gilt frame, and I shall never forget the expression of Parker's face as long as I live! I was hilarious over that, and furious at him, and grateful to his wife—yes, and sorry for her too—and relieved and glad for myself, all at once. I didn't say anything at all. I walked out and got into my car and drove away.

"I didn't know where I was driving, I had so much to think about. I just drove and drove, and finally I realized I was 'way out in the country and that a man in a big roadster—here's where you come in!—had been sticking right close to me for some time. I had a crazy notion you might be a detective, or a newspaper reporter, wanting me to tell the story about Parker. So I started to try to get away from you, if I could. And then—what happened then, anyway? Did your steering-gear break?"

"I don't think so," said Larry. "Did yours?" He felt better now, inexplicably better, light of heart.

"I don't know what did happen. Anyway, when it was over and I came to, I found myself here in this hospital, feeling all blooey, with the pain and shock and

everything. Dad was there, and by-and-by he remarked consolingly that my husband was all right. I said, 'Why I haven't got any husband, have I?' and he said, 'Yes dear, of course, don't you remember the note you left me?' I said I remembered the note, but that I didn't do it after all, and he said I must have, because a friend of his had seen me going into the justice of the peace's office with a dark-haired man, and a dark-haired man was with me in my coupé when we went over, and here I was with a platinum wedding-ring on my finger.

"I couldn't argue about it then very well, being too befuddled to know for sure just what was what, and the next time he came in he told me all the things you had said when he first saw you, about your car smashing into mine. He thought it was a joke, because there wasn't any other car anywhere around, he said. And he just thought you were delirious. I said, 'He was not delirious, he was telling the truth! He did have another car, and I never saw him before.' And dad took one wild look at me, and another at that wedding ring of Parker's and decided I was delirious too, and wouldn't pay the slightest attention."

"I understand now about the roadster," Larry said. "When I started for that farmhouse it was leaning there against a tree. I thought it was probably wrecked, too, but apparently it wasn't because somebody got it off there somehow and ran away with it. I've just had a notification that the police recovered it a few days later, up near Ogunquit, Maine. Knew it was mine by the license. But never mind that—go on with your story. I take it you haven't yet succeeded in convincing your father, since he continues to hail me as a member of the family."

Ann laughed, a little shame-facedly. "I'm afraid I'm going to have a hard time explaining to you from now on," she said. "As a matter of fact, I haven't really tried to convince him since then."

Larry looked his bewilderment, speechlessly.

"You see"—Ann's voice held a note of appeal—"you see, they found out who you were here at the hospital, of course, the day we were brought in. And dad is simply

tickled to death, thinking I'm married to you, the famous Mr. Larry Minot. Every time he comes into my room, just as I have the whole story on the tip of my tongue ready to blurt out, he begins raving about how happy he is that I chose a splendid young man like you. He goes on to remark that when he got my note he thought it must be that dastardly, scoundrelly snake-in-the-grass, Parker Peterson, but that he might have known I'd never break my poor old daddy's heart by such a downright flouting of his wishes as that. He continues in this vein for half an hour and then apologizes, actually *begs my pardon*, for having misjudged me so! And by the time he's through that, we're both weeping on one another's shoulders and I haven't the courage to tell him the truth! You see—"

Interruption intruded in the person of Ann's nurse. She was cheerful but determined. Mrs. Minot must get back into bed. It was too bad, she was sorry, but this was Mrs. Minot's first day up and she mustn't overdo it. They could talk again to-morrow.

Ann was wheeled away, for all the world like a petulant, protesting, beautiful baby in its go-cart. Larry, left behind, gazed long at the spot where she had been. "'Mrs. Minot,'" he repeated aloud several times. "'Mrs. Minot.'"

He elaborated it experimentally. "Mrs. Laurence Minot. Ann Minot. Ann Hale Minot."

"I'm a fool!" he jeered. "She's not Mrs. Minot, and she never will be."

It somehow didn't sound nearly as positive as it should have.

When he had been put back to bed, too, there came a note from her. It was brief—a mere ten words scribbled in pencil on a scrap of magazine-cover. "You must despise me," it said. "I shall tell him surely to-night."

Larry spent several moments in deep concentration over this. Then he dispatched his nurse to her room with the following reply: "I don't despise you at all, and *don't* tell him."

She wrote back, "Why not? It's not fair to you not to, is it?"

This communication reached Larry's bedside at the same time as his supper tray, and he chewed it, figuratively speaking, along with his mashed potato. When the nurse came to bear the tray away he addressed her solemnly. "Miss Ingalls!"

"Yes?"

"Would you like to take another message to—to my wife, by word of mouth this time?"

She said she would.

"Tell her," commanded Larry, "that I think *Ann Hale Minot* is about the best name I ever heard, and that it is beginning to establish itself in my mind with a kind of permanency."

There was no answer to this. Miss Ingalls returned to report that Mrs. Minot had seemed puzzled at first, and that then she had smiled.

"You're sure she smiled?" Larry queried. Miss Ingalls was quite sure. She rather expected more questions or more messages, but they were not forthcoming. Her patient smiled also, and seemed satisfied.

IV.

"BUT how are we going to do it?" Ann said the next morning on the sun-porch. They had been there half an hour and much can happen in half an hour.

"Easy!" Larry told her. "I'll be out of here before you are, you know, and I'll get the license and make all the arrangements. Then the minute they let you out, we'll run off somewhere on the sly for the actual ceremony."

"Aren't we ever going to tell my father?"

"Why should we?"

"Poor dad!" Ann mused smilingly. "We *did* try to tell him in the beginning, both of us, and he thought we were delirious! Isn't he ever to know how we put it over on him?"

Then Larry Minot made a pun, a low and simply abominable pun which deserved to die aborning, but which actually lived to a green old age as a sort of tradition in that household.

"Your dad," he said, "will always be a victim of *delirium trimmings*!"



The Busted Monopoly

By WALTER CLARE MARTIN

OTHER people's shortcomings had troubled Jason Makeover for a good many years. What troubled him most was the way they accepted their vices as matters of course; with no apparent effort towards wrenching free, no struggle for improvement.

At first his amazement was wide-eyed and open-mouthed; as, for example when he tasked his brother-in-law, a plumber:

"Don't you know it's that rotten pipe you smoke that makes you so nervous and keeps your stomach upset?" And the brother-in-law had replied leisurely:

"Yep, the doc tells me that has sumpin to do with it."

"Then why in the name of sense don't you quit? Don't you want to have good health?"

"Yep, good health's a mighty fine thing to have. Nothin' better I reckon. Still, it wouldn't seem quite natural without the old cob."

Jason Makeover can still feel his own flash of amazement as his relative, a middle aged man, well-to-do and at least semi-intelligent, admitted himself a hopeless case. Jason was sixteen then; he is thirty-six now. The interposing years have dulled the shock appreciably; but his wonderment is no less great. He cannot understand why human beings with even the semblance of a spinal ridge will go on year after year ruining their bodies, impairing their intellect, hastening their days. But he has ceased trying to save a lost world.

Decency, like charity, Jason decided, should begin at home, in his native city, at

the confluence of the Missouri and the Kaw. He believed personal habits more disgraceful in his city than at points farther east or west; because it was a custom among visitors from both east and west to leave their faults at home in keeping of their friends and bring their manners with them. Had Jason penetrated this it might have worried him less—or more.

Jason's first attempt to raise the standard of common decency in Middleville came three years later. It was purely altruistic, in behalf of the public, in the name of sanitation. Praiseworthy in the extreme, it yet wrecked an early romance and alienated some half dozen of his friends.

He was sitting in a movie house with his best girl. Her name was Letitia and her nose was the kind that is always getting in front of public mirrors for the purpose of chalking up defects. With Jason near by, however, the nose discreetly forebore this indulgence. Her mouth, too, forebore the luxury of its accustomed cud. Letitia admired Jason for his superiority, but never felt snug in his presence.

Lolling near by in the cinema theater was a paunchy man with a greasy face, crooked, sarcastic lips. His specialty was spitting on the floor. Disgustedly Jason writhed as he watched him. Other patrons writhed, too, but said nothing. Jason said something, and the greasy man resented it. So Jason said something else. A fight started. Several persons were hurt. Letitia's corn was milled. Jason got his man down and taught him "to spit on the floor." Then got him up and arrested him.

"Right!" said the judge, upholding Jason, as he imposed ten dollars and a lecture on the greasy man. Proud and vindicated, Jason bumped into more amazement when Letitia stopped him at a frozen threshold. Declared he had disgraced her by dragging her to court to be a public record of the number of times a dirty Hunky had spit on the floor.

He tried to explain that she should have felt honored, upholding the rights of society. She was soggy to his ideals. She didn't give a hang about society, except the kind that threw parties and joy rides. Besides, her corn hurt.

Disappointed in love, generally miscomprehended, Jason bore up with the courage of conviction—the greasy gent's conviction—until the night following, when he saw a similar gent at a similar place defy sanitation in a similar way with even more egregious abandon. Then he realized in a moral spasm, as men always realize great truths, what a futile thing was The Law.

He wandered far into the suburbs of his unthinking city, seething with indignation. What was the answer to this problem of other people's indecencies? Mothers and fathers took children by their shoulders and shoved them into the arms of the school teacher. The school teacher jabbered that two and two make four, X plus Y equals Z, *amo-amas-amat*; then dumped them with a load of undigested morals over the cancelli of the district court. The court intoned, "Five and costs," and went out to lunch; turning the offender loose to forget his financial spanking in a day or two—not to mention the 999 equally offensive offenders whom nobody happened to hale into court.

"Makes a man feel like taking the law into his own hands. Dirty, thoughtless muts—don't realize other people have rights—I sometimes feel like—"

Jason did not tell the listening landscape what he did feel like; but as he entered the door of his father's slumbering cottage in the suburbs his mature eyes glinted ominously in the moonlight, while his nose, sharper and more projecting than ever before, cast a prophetic shade over the dogmatic angle of his New England chin.

II.

The police of Middleville worked fast and scouted widely; but they were not able to keep up with the series of assaults that every night left from one to a dozen citizens lying bruised and befuddled at the edge of some unpatrolled sidewalk or staggering homeward with a throbbing head and a swelling jaw.

The victims complicated the mystery by refusing to talk about their mishaps. One and all they insisted they could postulate no motive for the crime—murmured something about mistaken identity, and showed

more than plainly that all they desired was to be let alone abundantly and not probed.

The first clew was contributed by a for-eigner who could neither read nor write. He shuffled into headquarters holding his contused mandible tenderly with his left hand while he conversed eloquently with his right. A card in his right hand caught official attention and was wrested from the palm between gestures.

A neat card it was, and white, about the size of a lady's calling card. It was ornamented by hand, a black border done in heavy ink, with the outline of a Red Cross nurse in the upper right hand corner. The message was typewritten and stated itself bluntly:

Nobody but a dirty pig would throw melon rinds and bologna scraps all over our pretty parks.

Enlightened, stimulated, the police cor-raled again a number of other victims of the unknown criminal and commanded them to produce their cards.

The majority of the victims denied they had seen any cards; blushing as they denied it. Others confessed to the cards; but failed to recall the message. Five were induced to dig the cards out of their pockets. These five cards were associated with recitals of assaults so similar in detail that every one, even the news reporters, agreed the crimes were the work of a lone adventurer, not a gang. The police records afford the following:

(1) John Kornig, banker, was alighting from a street car at Thirty-first and Walnut when a lanky young man in a slouch hat stepped close and handed him a card. He read: "*Nobody but a lazy boar would keep his seat for twenty blocks and let an old lady stand.*" Then the sky broke to pieces and fell down on him. He was positive his assailant used a mallet. No, he didn't see any mallet. No, he wasn't robbed. No, it wasn't true that he had let an aged lady stand. If a lady was standing in the car, he hadn't seen her.

(2) Toad Bulger, café keeper, was standing in the doorway of his own kitchen, when a lanky stranger in a dark slouch hat rounded the corner of the building and

thrust a card at him. Toad was a slow reader, and went to the floor before he completed the announcement: "*Nobody but a nasty tobacco worm would employ cooks that chew tobacco.*" No, he didn't see any mallet. No, he didn't employ cooks that chewed. His kitchen was inspected.

(3) Mrs. Isaac Fronck, 1223 Mole Street, was on her way home from a musical entertainment, when a man, whose dimensions she could not make out in the shadow of the elm trees, approached her and said, "Pardon me." He extended a card. "What's this for?" she asked him. "I can't read it here." Then he slapped her, a stinging wallop on the side of her face, and vanished before she could scream for assistance. She perused the card under an arc light: "*Nobody but a cackling old hen would buzz and jabber during a music recital that other people were trying to hear.*" No, it wasn't true. She didn't buzz and jabber. She had merely been telling Mrs. Goldfoil about cousin Sarah's boy, Jacob, who was going to Europe or somewhere to study music if the price of cotton goods kept up and his father could sell last year's stock at a premium. But as for bothering anybody at the performance, that was a falsehood and an insult. She had hardly spoke two words.

(4) Jack Alleck, office clerk, was egressing from a down town building in broad daylight when some one slipped a card into his vest pocket and gave him a bust on the liver that sank him gasping to the sidewalk while a crowd gathered around. It was minutes before he could explain what had happened. His card declared: "*Nobody but an unabridged jackass would smoke in a crowded elevator, already nauseating from its lack of air.*" Well, maybe he had forgotten to throw away his pill when he squeezed into the elevator car; he didn't exactly remember. Like the other victims he admitted to his secret soul that he probably would remember next time.

(5) Frank Mowth, post office employee, told a man with a set mouth and a sharp nose under a slouch hat how to address his mail. The other clerks picked Frank up in a groggy condition and doctored his bleeding nose. On the shelf was a card: "*No-*

body but a snarly fyce will snap at persons who have to trade at his window, simply because he is employed by the Government and doesn't expect to get fired for his insults." No, it was an outrageous falsehood. He hadn't insulted a patron. He only had explained to him courteously the post office rules.

III

JASON MAKEOVER leaned against a telephone pole in his quiet residential district and exulted. The sun had gone to bed gloriously with all colors spread. Twilight was purple sweet and restful. Green spring was all about him; it was good to be alive. Moreover, his plan for reforming Middleville had been a complete, spectacular, unqualified success. Everywhere one could notice the difference. Persons habitually indifferent to public decency and common welfare were beginning to watch their step. They were afraid of the mysterious avenger. Men and women were learning to cough into their handkerchiefs and public service employees were getting the snarls out of their tongues. It had been hard work, but he felt rewarded. In order to have the right card handy he had catalogued 534 malpractices, and almost as many names of offenders. Entering a street car, he would simply detach several cards which might apply to street car habits. In post offices, elevators, at parties, on the street, he anticipated the guilty, growing more prophetic each day.

The most exhilarating fact was his ap-

parent immunity. Fifty-nine indecent characters disciplined in four weeks, and nobody suspected Jason! His folks were so respectable; he, himself, so austere.

His flattering recollections ceased suddenly, and he pricked up his ears. Two boys were quarreling vociferously, about half a block down the street. It gave the neighborhood a bad atmosphere; so Jason hurried to intervene. Laying a hand against each lad's angry bosom, he pushed them forcibly apart.

"Let's not have any scraps here in front of people's houses!" He shook them correctively.

A man who figured indefinitely against the deepening twilight came down the street rapidly and handed Jason a card.

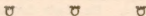
In his mother's bedroom he ascended to consciousness in time to hear the physician say the jaw was not fractured, but might be tender for a month or more. Lifting a hand to feel at the bandage he discovered he was still clutching the piece of cardboard on which his fingers had tightened with sudden tetanus at the impact of the stranger's wallop.

The card was pencil-printed, not neatly typewritten like his own, but the message was just as legible—

Nobody but a long-horned goat would attempt to butt in and regulate everybody else's shortcomings.

"The field," muttered Jason, "is getting too crowded. Every jackass in Middleville thinks he knows how to reform!"

THE END



FIRST LOVE

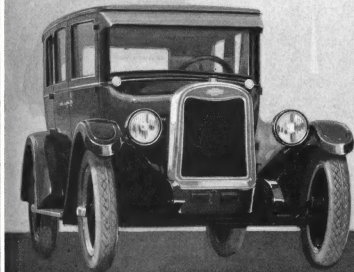
WE passed each other in the dark
And never spoke, but yet I knew
Your love-lit glance—a burning spark—
Which kindled love within me, too.

But when we met at noon of day
I did not raise, to smile, my eyes;
With lowered gaze went on my way,
So even you could not surmise!

Grace J. Hyatt.
10 A



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